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**The West African  
Journal Of Education  
(WAJE)**

**VOLUME XXXII**

**2012**

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# TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF COLLABORATIVE INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*This study examined the perceptions of regular and special education teachers in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria on collaborative instructional practices in inclusive schools. The descriptive research design was adopted with a total of one hundred and fifteen randomly selected teachers comprising (102 regular teachers, [88.7%], and 13 special teachers, [11.3%]). A self-designed questionnaire tagged "Perception of Collaborative Instructional Practices for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Education Setting" (PCIPSLD) [ $\alpha=0.77$ ] was utilized. Data obtained were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations and *t*-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. Results showed that respondents got an overall mean of 3.15 with highest mean as 4, indicating a positive perception towards ten ingredients necessary for effective collaborative practices for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools. Likewise, the study showed that special education teachers have positive perceptions about the characteristics of three models of collaboration namely, co-teaching (overall mean = 3.21); collaborative consulting (overall mean = 2.94); and partnership with parents (overall mean = 3.23). Besides, no significant difference was found between regular and special education teachers in their perception of collaborative instructional practices for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools ( $t = 0.922$ ;  $df = 113$ ). It was recommended that regular and special education teachers should be exposed to continuous professional development programmes to enable them to become more skillful in teaching students with learning disabilities. Teachers were also advised to adopt co-teaching, collaborative consultation, and partnership with parents, in their classrooms for improved students' outcomes.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, Collaborative instructional practices, Students with learning disabilities, regular and special education teachers.

## Introduction

In the past, teachers of students with and without disabilities often spent most of their school day alone in their classrooms, left to independently teach their subject matters and enforce necessary discipline on their students to ensure good academic performance.

However, this practice is gradually changing due to the increasing diversity of student populations (particularly among students with special needs), and an era of high accountability. Transforming school learning environments into settings where educators are able to ensure that all students in their care are successful is a complex and demanding task. An individual teacher can no longer be expected to meet all the needs of every learner. In today's schools, collaboration is considered a powerful tool that teachers can utilize to achieve their varied roles as instructors, facilitators, managers, mentors, evaluators and professionals (Drake, 2006).

Ideally, collaboration represents the interaction among two or more individuals, encompassing a variety of behaviours, including communication, information sharing, coordination, cooperation, problem solving, and negotiation (Intelligence Community Collaboration, 1999). Thus, collaborative practices are considered as essential processes necessary for effective instruction in inclusive education programmes (Jackson, Harper & Jackson, 2010; Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005). By implication therefore, many educators agree that any plan to implement inclusive education programme that does not include collaborative partnership among all stakeholders is not likely to succeed.

Inclusive education is an educational programme that allows all children and young people with or without disabilities to learn together in a regular school with appropriate support. In such inclusive setting all children are seen as equal members of the classroom and school community as the case may be (Ozaji, 2006). The goal of inclusion in the opinion of Obani (2004) is not to erase (or deny the existence of) difference, but to enable all students to belong to an educational community that values and validates their individuality. According to Rogers (1993), inclusion brings the support services to the student rather than moving the student to the services and it requires only that the student will benefit from being in the class rather than having to keep up with the other students.

Collaboration is an important tool that is needed to create meaningful and effective learning within an inclusive education setting. It may therefore be necessary for regular and special education teachers to collaborate with one another and with other professionals in order to ensure that their students achieve good academic performance and attain their desired educational heights. As a 'hidden' disability, learning disability is described in the literature as chronic difficulties in learning to read, write, spell or calculate. It is not as obvious as other disabilities such as sensory impairments, intellectual disability, social or emotional disturbances. Learning disability is not often pronounced until these children get to upper primary classes. By the time these children become adolescents, it is likely that they would have significantly fallen behind their peers in their learning. Thus, teachers of students with learning disabilities should consider collaborative teaching arrangements as paramount to their students' success.

Friend and Cook (2007) proposed a definition, of school-based collaboration as a style for interaction between co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal. These researchers also outlined the defining characteristics of successful collaboration as follows:

- i. involving a style or approach (as a style or an approach to interaction;
  - ii. voluntary (individuals enter into collaborative relationships freely and exist by choice);
  - iii. requiring parity among participants (in collaboration, each participant's contribution is equally valued, and participants have equal power in decision making);
  - iv. based on mutual problems/goals (collaboration occurs in response to a goal, problem, or need that is jointly shared by the participants);
  - v. depending on shared responsibility for participation and decision making (participants in a collaborative activity share responsibility for participating in the activity and in the decision making that it entails);
  - vi. consisting of individuals who share their resources (participants in a collaborative activity share material and human resources); and
  - viii. consisting of individuals who share accountability for outcomes (participants in a collaborative activity have equal accountability for the outcome of that activity).
- Friend and Cook (2007) further enumerated some emergent characteristics that both contribute to and emerge from effective collaborative relationships. These include beliefs and values that support collaboration, mutual trust, mutual respect, and establishment of a sense of community.

**Models of collaborative instructional practices include:**

(a) **Co-teaching:** In this arrangement, two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, blended group of students in a single physical space. Through co-teaching teachers or other professionals are assisted to form instructional partnerships for the purpose of delivering high quality instruction to diverse classroom groups.

(b) **Consultation:** In consultation, a professional such as a psychologist, behaviour specialist, speech-language therapist, or special educator meets on a regular basis with teachers to solve problems. These professionals often go from one classroom to another, serving as consultants to regular teachers of the various classes. By jointly identifying a problem, systematically developing an intervention, gathering data, and judging the intervention's effectiveness, teachers and consultants can maximize student learning (Friend, 2008).

(c) **Partnership with Parents:** Inclusion is not just a school issue; it is about children, parents and the community (Schwartz, Odom & Sandall, 1999). Parents are the primary and natural educators and by actively involving parents in the education of their children with disabilities teachers work hand-in-hand in educating these children. Partnership with parents also enables teachers to gather students' past history, background information and experiences.

The Florida Department of Education (1989, 1990) revealed that collaboration improved communication among general and special educators and enabled students eligible for special education who were placed in general education to maintain their performance

levels. Peck, Killen and Baumgart (1989) discovered improved learner outcomes as well as teacher confidence as a result of collaboration among preschool classroom teachers and special educators in Washington. In the same study, an increased willingness to implement specialized instruction in line with Individual Educational Programmes (IEPs) was recorded as a result of collaboration.

Another study conducted by Thousand, Villa, Meyers and Nevinin (1994) on the attitudes of over six hundred general and special educators and administrators from six states in the United States of America and one Canadian province revealed that the education of children with disabilities in general and special education classrooms both requires and enhances role release through a collaborative planning, teaching, and evaluation process. The vast majority of general and special educators surveyed believed that students with special education needs can have their academic and social goals met in general education classrooms, that they as educators share responsibility for meeting the needs of all students and that through collaborative processes they acquire new instructional skills. Those with more experience in collaboration had stronger beliefs in the benefits of inclusive education for all children.

In an investigation on the evolution of one progressively oriented, inclusive public elementary school in the United States over a fifteen year period (1983 -1998) by Kugelmass (2000) collaboration among teachers, students and parents emerged as central to both the evolution and maintenance of the school's inclusive culture. This simply indicates that collaboration is a key ingredient in building an inclusive education community.

Packard, Hazelkorn, Harris and McLeod (2011) examined the achievement level of ninth grade students with learning disabilities who received instruction in a resource classroom as against that of students with learning disabilities who received instruction in a co-taught general education classroom. The findings indicated that the students with learning disabilities in the resource classroom achieved at a better level than students who received their instruction in the co-taught classroom. This study therefore lends credence to the assumption that although co-teaching has become a widespread instructional option for students with disabilities, there are concerns regarding its effectiveness on student achievement especially at the secondary level.

Based on the foregoing, this paper presents the perception of regular and special teachers about collaborative instruction for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools in Ibadan.



## Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study were:

1. What is the perception of regular and special education teachers about the ingredients for successful implementation of collaborative instructional practices for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools?
2. What is the perception of regular and special education teachers about characteristics of four collaborative instructional practices for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools namely, co-teaching, teaming, collaborative consulting and partnership with parents?

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis tested in the study was as follows:

1. There is no significance difference between regular and special education teachers' perception of collaborative instructional practices for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools.

## Methodology

Survey research design was used for the study.

### Population

The population for the study comprised all the regular and special education teachers in all primary and secondary schools, Oyo State.

### Sampling technique and sample

Multistage sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample for the study. The state has thirty-three local government areas which were clustered into three in consonance with the three senatorial zones (Oyo Central, Oyo North and Oyo South). One senatorial zone that is Oyo Central (comprising Oyo and Ibadan sub-zones) was randomly selected. Further randomization of the two sub zones led to the selection of Ibadan sub zone. From Ibadan sub zone three local governments were randomly selected. Further, six schools from the three local governments (three primary and three secondary schools were randomly selected. Next was the selection of teachers for the study.

One hundred and twenty-five (125) randomly selected teachers from selected primary and secondary schools within Ibadan metropolis participated in this study. There were fifty-six (56) male teachers (44.8%) and sixty-nine (69) female teachers (55.2%). A majority of the respondents comprising one hundred and two (102) are regular education teachers

(88.7%) while thirteen (13) are special education teachers (11.3%). Demographic data collected further indicated that while 42.2% of the respondents teach in the primary school, 57.8% of them are secondary school teachers. In addition, teachers' work experience is represented thus: 1-10 years of experience constituted 53.8%; 11-20 years of experience constituted 24.2%; 21-30 years of experience constituted 15.9%; and 31 years of experience and above constituted 6.1%.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire tagged "the Perception of Collaborative Instructional Practices for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Education Setting" (PCIPSLD). Section A contained demographic information on gender, age, educational discipline, qualification, work experience and job status of respondents. Section B elicited information on teachers' perception of ingredients for successful implementation of collaboration in inclusive education setting. It comprised ten (10) items. Section C sought information on features of three models of collaboration: co-teaching, collaborative consulting, and partnership with parents. There were twenty (20) items in this section. All the items were generated based on information gotten from literature. The questionnaire is a 4 - point scale with response options of Strongly Agree – 4 points, Agree – 3 points, Disagree -2 points and Strongly Disagree – 1 point. On this 4 – point scale, a response that falls between 1 and 2 represent a negative perception while a response that falls between 3 and 4 represent a positive perception by respondents.

The instrument was trial tested on a group of teachers who were not part of the respondents for the study. The result of the trial testing was used to determine the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach alpha technique. A reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained for the instrument.

### **Method of data collection**

Three research assistants were trained and they participated in the distribution of the questionnaire as well as their retrieval. One hundred and forty five (145) copies of the questionnaire were distributed, but only one hundred and thirty – two (91.3%) copies were retrieved. Out of these one hundred and thirty – two questionnaires, seven questionnaires (5.3%) were discarded because they were not properly completed. The researcher then utilized only one hundred and twenty-five questionnaires (94.7%) for the analysis.

### **Method of data analysis**

Frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions while t-test statistics was used to analyze the hypothesis.

### **Results**

**Research Question 1:** What is the perception of regular and special education teachers

Table 1: Summary of the Perception of Regular and Special Education Teachers on Ingredients for Successful Implementation of Collaborative Instructional Practices for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Schools

S/N	Item Description	Regular Teachers		Special Teachers	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S. D
1.	Most successful teachers are those who collaborate constructively with other professionals.	2.77	.82	2.77	.93
2.	Teachers must reflect on their personal belief systems to see if they have the tolerance toward changing their standards in their classrooms.	3.02	.60	2.85	.38
3.	Students' needs, the subject being taught, teachers' experience, space and time for planning determine the best collaborative model to use.	3.26	.69	3.31	.63
4.	Classroom management is vital for successful collaborative practice. As a result, teachers/professionals who manage their classroom well are likely to collaborate effectively.	3.02	.69	2.69	.63
5.	Teachers must participate in ongoing professional development programmes to prepare for new teaching situations such as inclusion.	3.32	.62	3.54	.66
6.	Professionals should possess effective communication skills.	3.34	.52	3.38	.51
7.	Teachers should have sound interaction-process skills such as conducting effective meetings, responding to resistance.	3.27	.62	3.30	.48
8.	Administrative and support staff must make effort to contribute to the collaborative atmosphere.	3.49	.50	3.69	.48
9.	Recognizing the skills of each professional and developing mutual skill can enhance working relationship.	3.24	.58	3.15	.55
10.	Professionals must engage in shared problem solving.	3.00	.80	3.08	.64
	<b>Overall Mean</b>	3.17		3.18	

Table 1 indicates that regular and special education teachers agreed on all the areas listed in items 1-10 with mean ratings ranging between 2.69 and 3.69. For instance, they agreed that teachers must collaborate constructively with other professionals ( $x = 2.77$  and  $2.77$  for regular and special teachers respectively); teachers must reflect on their personal belief systems ( $x = 3.02$  and  $2.85$  for regular and special teachers respectively); teachers must participate in ongoing professional development programmes to prepare for new teaching situations like inclusion ( $x = 3.32$  and  $3.54$  for regular and special teachers respectively); professionals should possess effective communication skills ( $x = 3.34$  and  $3.38$  for regular and special teachers respectively); professionals must engage in shared problem solving ( $x = 3.00$  and  $3.08$  for regular and special teachers respectively). From all these, it can be inferred that regular and special education teachers have positive perception of the ingredients of collaboration for students with learning

Tables 2 a, b, c: Summary of the Perception of Regular and Special Education Teachers on the Features of Co-Teaching, Collaborative Consulting and Partnership with Parents of Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Schools

## 2(a) Co-teaching

S/N	Item Description	Regular Teachers		Special Teachers	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S. D
11.	In co-teaching partnership/classroom, both teachers take on teaching and supportive roles.	3.21	.49	3.23	.60
12.	In co-teaching partnership/classroom, careful planning of roles and responsibilities is imperative.	3.55	.52	3.62	.51
13.	In co-teaching partnership/classroom, collaborative planning time is a must.	3.20	.51	3.31	.48
14.	In co-teaching partnership/classroom, there must be two professionals in the classroom.	3.05	.76	3.38	.77
15.	In co-teaching partnership/classroom, students are heterogeneously grouped; those with disabilities are appropriately integrated with their peers without disabilities.	2.98	.51	3.08	.28
	<b>Overall Mean</b>	3.20		3.32	

Table 2a shows that regular and special education teachers agreed on the five areas representing the features of co-teaching as indicated in respondents mean ratings for items 11-15 which ranges between 2.98 and 3.62. For example, respondents consider careful planning of roles and responsibilities as imperative in a co-teaching classroom ( $x = 3.55$  and  $3.62$  for regular and special teachers respectively); respondents agreed that in co-teaching classroom both teachers take on teaching and supportive roles ( $x = 3.21$  and  $3.23$  for regular and special teachers respectively); they agreed that in co-teaching, students are heterogeneously grouped ( $x = 2.98$  and  $3.08$  for regular and special teachers respectively).

From all these, it can be inferred that regular and special education teachers have positive perception score on a 4 point scale greater than 2.0 about the characteristics of co-teaching for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools (Overall Mean =  $3.20$  and  $3.32$  for regular and special teachers respectively).

## 2(b) Collaborative Consulting

S/N	Item Description	Regular Teachers		Special Teachers	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
16.	Collaborative consulting entails that; one professional who has particular expertise assists another professional who needs the benefit of others.	3.16	.70	3.31	.48
17.	With a collaborative consulting model, a consultant such as a learning disability specialist contributes specialized information toward an educational need.	3.32	.47	3.38	.51
18.	With a collaborative consulting model, one special teacher could go from classroom to classroom holding brief with many teachers in the same day.	2.59	.50	2.70	.48
19.	On benefit of a collaborative consulting model is that for the learner, there would be no need to be isolated from the other children in the classroom.	2.77	.61	2.92	.64
20.	With a collaborative consulting model, the consultee such as the regular school teacher uses the information and expertise of consultants and other collaborators to provide direct service to the client.	2.78	.41	2.92	.28
<b>Overall Mean</b>		2.92		3.05	

Table 2b shows that respondents are in agreement with ideas stated in items 21 -25 with mean ranging between 2.59 and 3.38. For instance, they agreed that in collaborative consulting, one professional who has particular expertise assists another professional who needs the benefit of others ( $x = 3.16$  and  $3.31$  for regular and special teachers respectively they also agreed that a consultant such as a learning disability specialist, contributes specialized information toward an educational need ( $x = 3.32$  and  $3.38$  for regular and special teachers respectively).

From all these, it can be inferred that regular and special education teachers have positive perception about the features of collaborative consulting as a model of collaboration for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools (Overall Mean =  $2.92$  and  $3.05$  for regular and special teachers respectively).

## 2(c) Partnership with Parents

S/N	Item Description	Regular Teachers		Special Teachers	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
21.	Partnership with parents enables family members to get to understand that they are important stakeholders in the process of their child's education.	3.31	.66	3.46	.66
22.	Partnership with parents ensures that parents become excellent consultants, collaborators, and team teachers in inclusive schools.	3.16	.37	3.23	.44
23.	A feature of partnership with parents is that the teacher invites the parents and they agree on the role each can play in order to monitor the child's learning.	3.25	.52	3.23	.60
24.	Parents get to develop more understanding and concern for their children through collaborative partnership with parents.	3.36	.48	3.54	.52
25.	Collaboration with family members is necessary because parents spend more time with their children than the teachers.	3.06	.50	3.08	.64
<b>Overall Mean</b>		3.23		3.31	

Table 2c indicates that the respondents agreed on items 26 - 30 with mean ranging between 3.06 and 3.54. For instance, they agreed that partnership with parents enables parents to develop more understanding and concern for their children ( $x = 3.36$  and  $3.54$  for regular and special teachers respectively); the teacher invites the parents and they agree on the role each can play in order to monitor the child's learning ( $x = 3.25$  and  $3.23$  for regular and special teachers respectively); parents can also be excellent consultants, collaborators, and team teachers in inclusive schools ( $x = 3.16$  and  $3.23$  for regular and special teachers respectively).

From all these, it can be inferred that regular and special education teachers have positive perception about the characteristics of partnership with parents as a model of collaboration for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools (Overall Mean =  $3.23$  and  $3.31$  for regular and special teachers respectively).

## Test of Hypothesis

There is no significance difference between regular and special education teachers' perception about collaborative instructional practices for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools.

Table 3: Summary of t-test Analysis Showing Differences between Regular and Special Education Teachers' Perception of Collaborative Instructional Practices for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Schools

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	Df	Sig.	Remark
Regular Education Teachers	102	94.73	6.81	0.922	113	.359	Not sig.
Special Education Teachers	13	96.62	8.09				

Table 3 above shows that there is no significant difference between regular and special education teachers in their perception about collaborative instructional practices for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools ( $t = 0.922$ ;  $df = 113$ ;  $P > .05$  level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

### Discussion

The findings of the study have revealed that regular and special education teachers jointly agree that through constructive collaboration professionals responsible for the education of students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools can contribute meaningfully to their students' improved academic achievement. The findings have shown that to achieve successful collaboration in inclusive schools, both regular and special education teachers can engage in a reflection of their personal belief systems to see if they can tolerate changes in their classrooms.

Other elements of successful collaboration supported by the findings of this study are teachers' consideration of: the needs of their students and the subjects being taught; the classroom space available to them and the time available for teaching and the experience of teachers that will participate in the collaborative process. All these factors will determine what collaborative model (co-teaching, collaborative consulting or partnership with parents) to adopt.

In addition, regular and special education teachers agreed that effective communication skills, good classroom management skills, sound interaction-process skills (ability to conduct effective meetings, resolve conflicts, respond to resistance) possession of good working relationship, support by administrative and non-teaching staff, and ability to engage in shared problem solving are all necessary ingredients for collaborative instructional practices.

These findings corroborated with the views of Jackson, Harper and Jackson (2010), Dettmer, Thurston, and Dyck (2005) that collaborative practices are considered as essential processes necessary for effective instruction in inclusive education

programmes. Also, this finding lent credence to the views expressed by Friend and Cook (2007) on the defining and some emergent characteristics of successful collaboration such as an approach to interaction, being voluntary, shared responsibility, possessing beliefs and values that support collaboration, mutual trust, mutual respect, and establishment of a sense of community.

Besides, the findings of this study have showed that regular and special teachers understand the nature of the co-teaching model of collaborative instruction: students are heterogeneously grouped, both teachers take on teaching and supportive roles and both teachers carefully plan what their roles and responsibilities should be. It then implies that regular and special teachers are favourably disposed to the idea of placing students with learning disabilities in co-teaching classrooms for students' maximum academic achievement. These findings however, contradict the findings of Packard, Hazelkom, Harris and McLeod (2011) which indicated that students with learning disabilities in the resource classroom achieved at a better level than students who received their instruction in the co-taught classroom.

Furthermore, the study participants agreed that collaborative consulting is equally a significant model of collaborative practices in inclusive schools. The finding revealed that collaborating consulting is all about a collaborative consultant contributing specialized information toward the educational need of a student with learning disabilities. These findings also agree with Friend (2008) opinion that teachers and consultants can maximize student learning by adopting the consulting approach to collaboration.

In addition, the findings showed that partnership with parents is an important model of collaborative instruction for students with learning disabilities. Regular and special education teachers indicated agreement to the idea that through collaborative practices, parents become excellent consultants, collaborators and team teachers in inclusive schools. This finding agree with the assertions of Schwartz, Odom and Sandall (1999) that professionals can partner with parents and community for better results in inclusive schools.

In general, this study has shown that regular and special education teachers hold similar views on collaborative instructional practices in inclusive schools. It can therefore be deduced that regular and special teachers in Ibadan, Oyo State are convinced that collaborative instructional practices (co-teaching, collaborative consultation and partnership with parents) are key elements that would lead to successful implementation of inclusive education programmes for students with learning disabilities.



### Conclusion and Recommendations

Having considered the findings of this study, it can be inferred that regular and special education teachers in Ibadan, Oyo State share similar viewpoints on the issue of collaborative instructional practices for students with learning disabilities in inclusive schools. This singular opinion is a positive one. Thus, it can be inferred that primary school teachers and secondary school teachers in Ibadan understand largely, what the concepts of inclusion and collaborative instruction are all about.

The following recommendations are therefore considered relevant on the basis of the findings. The government should engage in more, intense, massive public enlightenment and publicity campaigns to further sensitize the public on collaborative instruction and inclusive education.

Other stakeholders in the education of students with learning disabilities such as the teachers, religious bodies, other professionals (counsellors, psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists), and parents and even students with learning disabilities themselves, should embark on explicit awareness programmes on collaboration and inclusion.

Continuous professional development programmes that are aimed at updating teachers' knowledge and skills in the education of students with learning disabilities should be enforced. Primary and secondary school teachers should be well informed on the concepts of collaboration and inclusion and they should be given financial support to assist them to participate in conferences, seminars and workshops where current trends and issues are discussed.

Teachers of students with learning disabilities should endeavour to keep abreast with global innovative ideas and technological advancement in their field, as these will make their lessons more interesting and meaningful.

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