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A STUDY ON INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS: NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY-2020

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Abstract

As the globe rapidly changes, so does the need for everyone to have access to excellent higher education. The best strategy to develop and use the large talent pool in our nation is to continue the current trend toward greater quality. To solve the difficulties of making "each and every higher education institution a respectable and top institution for higher education," a new National Education Policy is being developed. It is disorganized, and learning objectives and the development of cognitive skills are not given enough attention. A country that is educated, socially aware, ethical, intelligent, and adept at formulating and putting into practice workable solutions to its problems is shaped in part by higher education. This article analyzes the planned changes to the regulatory framework, instructional methodology, and higher education system in India. A comparison was also made between the GDPs of SAARC and BRICS nations and the amount of money they spent on education.

Keywords: "BRICS, Higher Education, National Education Policy, Reforms, Regulatory Structure, SAARC."

Introduction

Expanding "higher education leads to economic growth, diversity, increased resources, and technological advancements. Higher education plays a crucial role in developing a progressive, socially aware, intellectually capable nation adept at devising and implementing practical solutions to its problems."[1] India's higher education system needs to catch up to that of other prosperous countries regarding quality. The primary objective of "the National Education Policy" is to implement substantial reforms in the higher education system to provide job opportunities, foster adaptability, and promote the development of a fair, inclusive, and diverse society. The policy is grounded on "access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability." Its goal is "to convert India into a prosperous center of knowledge. The National Education Policy 2020 is a commendable reform that updates a policy idea that is 34 years old and anticipates necessary changes in the Indian Education System. It maintains a delicate equilibrium between tradition & a multidisciplinary strategy."[2] The government ignored the advice of the Kothari Commission, which suggested allocating a minimum of 6% of the GDP to education expenditure.[3]

Higher education has faced significant challenges, such as uncontrolled expansion, the issue of educated individuals being unable to find jobs, unequal progress, the transformation of education into a commercial enterprise, financial crises, and the disparity between access to digital resources and the quality of education. These challenges have affected the balance "between quantity and quality, fairness and excellence, and innovation and conformity. These issues provide enduring challenges to higher education."[4] The Indian higher education system is categorized into many tiers, encompassing:

1. Technical and Vocational Education.
2. Programs leading to the award of a diploma.
3. Undergraduate or bachelor's degree education.
4. Education at the postgraduate or master's level refers to advanced academic programs pursued after completing a bachelor's degree.
5. Doctoral Programs or the Ph.D. degree.

India now has 10,725 autonomous institutions, 39,931 colleges, and 993 universities. Currently, the number of individuals enrolled in a postsecondary program is estimated to be 37.4 million. "The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for Higher Education in India is computed as 27.1 percent for students aged 18 to 23, with males comprising 26.9 percent and females comprising 27.3 percent of the overall enrolment."[6]

Table 1: India's higher education gross enrollment ratio for the previous 8 years

Years	Male	Female	Total
2019-20	26.9	27.3	27.1
2018-19	26.3	26.4	26.3
2017-18	26.3	25.4	25.8
2016-17	26.0	24.5	25.2
2015-16	25.4	23.5	24.5
2014-15	25.3	23.2	24.3
2013-14	23.9	22.0	23.0
2012-13	22.7	20.1	21.5

Source: "compiled from (AISHE, 2021) : All India Survey on Higher Education 2019- 2020"

Implementing "the National Education Policy has resulted in a 5% rise in the Gross Enrollment Ratio in the last seven years. Achieving a further 24% increase in the Gross Enrollment Ratio over the next 15 years will be challenging for the higher education system, requiring effective policy implementation."

A significant challenge facing the higher education system today is its significant stagnation, characterized by a reduced focus on developing cognitive abilities and desired educational achievements. The main objective of the ongoing epidemic is

to enhance the tools and methodologies for e-learning and digital classrooms. Educational institutions need more teacher and institutional independence and insufficient mechanisms for evaluating and advancing faculty members and administrators based on merit. “Poor governance and leadership and an ineffective regulatory framework” are further exacerbating the issues afflicting the higher education sector. Implementing a rigorous categorization of disciplines, an early focus on specific areas of study, and separating students based on their interests leads to developing specialized fields of study. Some students choose a subject only based on the abundance of job prospects, disregarding their preferences. Access to higher education is restricted, particularly in socioeconomically deprived regions, due to a limited number of institutions providing local language instruction. India's expenditure on research and innovation is now 0.69 percent of its GDP, much lower than “the United States' 2.8 percent, Israel's 4.3 percent, and South Korea's 4.2 percent.” The emphasis on research at most universities and colleges is limited, resulting in a need for more financing for peer-reviewed research in several disciplines. The present student enrollment in higher education seeking PhDs is at a mere 0.5 percent. This low figure may be attributed to the crowded employment market for PhDs, which offers hugely few options outside academia (Bhattacharjee, 2019). The presence of large affiliating institutions sometimes leads to a decline in the standards of undergraduate education, which is now a focal point for enhancing the quality of higher education. The study also examines the SAARC nations and their education expenditure as a proportion of their GDP to assess the relationship between investments in education and a country's future growth.

Table 2: Government expenditure of SAARC Countries on education in % of GDP

Government expenditure on education of SAARC countries in % of GDP									
Country/Year	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
India	3.9	3.8	-	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.5
Sri Lanka	1.5	1.6	1.9	2.2	3.4	2.8	2.1	1.9	-
Bhutan	-	5.7	6.0	7.6	7.0	7.2	6.9	5.7	-
Nepal	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.9	4.8	4.4	4.2	4.4
Bangladesh	2.2	1.9	-	-	1.5	2.5	1.9	1.3	-
Afghanistan	3.3	3.5	3.7	3.3	3.5	3.7	3.2	3.2	-
Pakistan	2.2	2.5	2.5	2.7	3.0	2.9	-	2.5	-

Maldives	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.9	3.7	3.9	3.9	4.1	-

"Source: Compiled by the researcher from (BRICS, 2018) and (World Bank, 2022)"

"Table 2" indicates that "Bhutan" allocates the highest proportion of its GDP on education, with Nepal and India following suit. In 2012, the proportion of India's total GDP allocated to education by the government was 3.9 percent. This percentage remained almost stable for four years, with a little decrease to 3.84 percent in 2013. By 2020, it has had a little increase to 4.5. Over the past 12 years, India has consistently allocated an average of 1.47 percent of its budget towards higher education, according to the Economic Survey (2019-2020 & 2020-21).[7] There is a need for reforms in education policy to improve the quality of education. Comparatively, "Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and the Maldives allocate a higher percentage of their GDP towards education than India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Between 2012 and 2018, India consistently held the lowest position among the BRICS nations in government expenditure on education as a proportion of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). South Africa and Brazil allocate about 5% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per year to education."

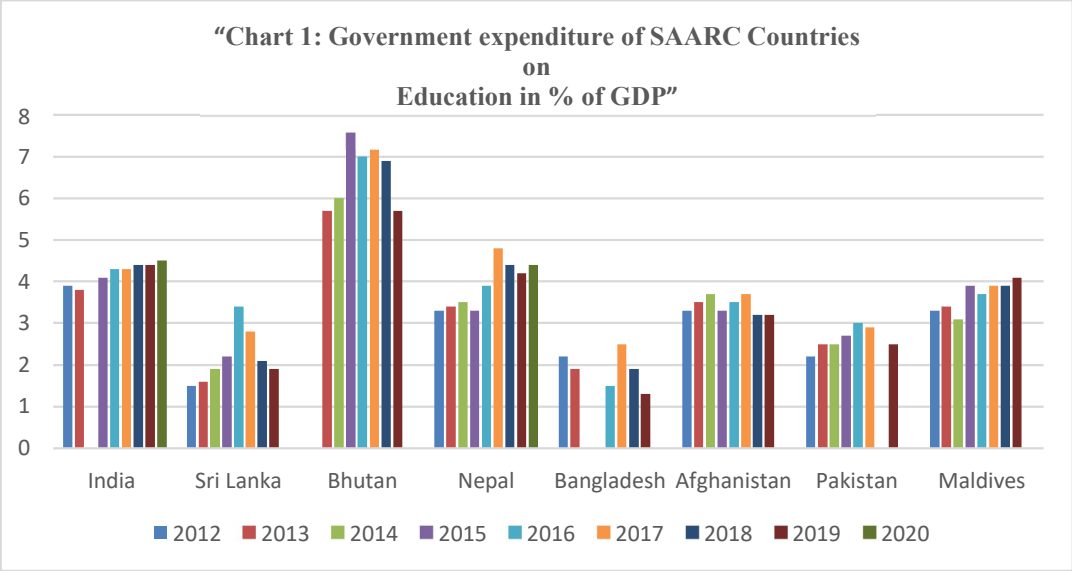
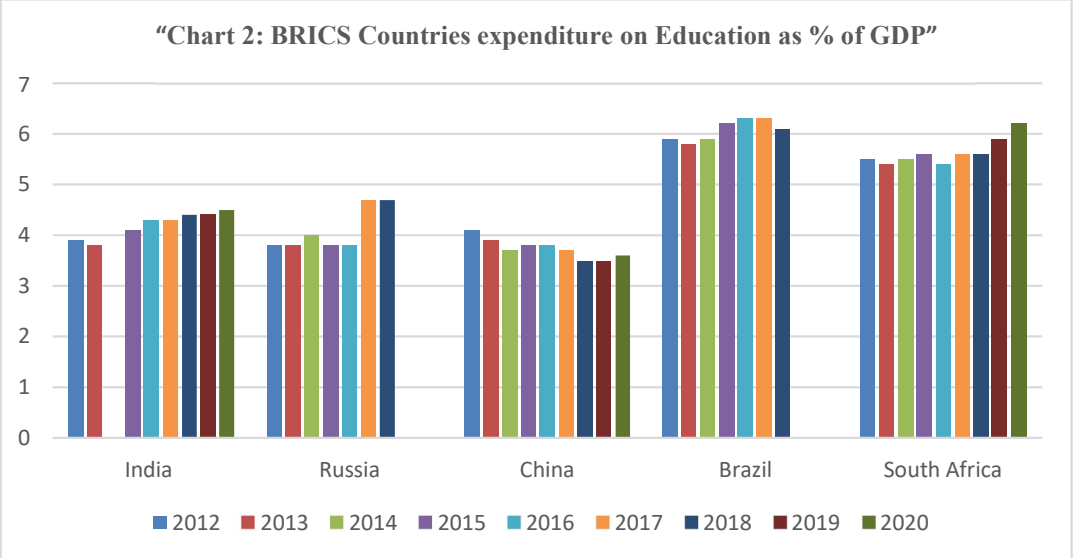


Table 3: Government expenditure of BRICS Countries on Education as % of GDP

BRICS Countries expenditure on Education as % of GDP									
Country	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
India	3.9	3.8	-	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.5
Russia	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.8	3.8	4.7	4.7	-	-
China	4.1	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.6
Brazil	5.9	5.8	5.9	6.2	6.3	6.3	6.1	-	-
South Africa	5.5	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.4	5.6	5.6	5.9	6.2

"Source: Compiled by the researcher from, (World Bank, 2022), (BRICS, 2018)"

Table 3 reveals that South Africa and Brazil allocate the most significant proportion of their GDP to education among the BRICS countries, as shown by data from the World Bank in 2022. From 2012 to 2018, South Africa allocated around 5.5% of its GDP to education. However, in 2019 and 2020, they significantly raised their spending in this area. China maintains a very consistent level of expenditure on education. Russia has raised its expenditures since 2017. India's expenditure on the "education sector as a proportion of its GDP has risen since 2015." However, there was a modest decline in India's education expenditures from 2012 to 2014. Brazil and South Africa are allocating a higher proportion of their "education budget compared to Russia, India, and China, among the BRICS countries."



Evolution of India's National Education Policy:

Before independence, students in India were taught about the Upanishads, Buddhism, the Middle Ages, and the Modern Era. The basis of contemporary structured education was laid in 1871 by the Madrasas of Calcutta, and it concluded in 1944 with the Sergeant Report. Several important documents were underway as early as 1854: the Government of India Resolution (1913), the Indian Universities Act (1904), "Lord Macaulay's Minute (1882), the Indian Education Commission (1882)," and Wood's Dispatch on Education (1854).

After independence, the Education Commission significantly impacted Indian educational Policy.[8] The first was the University Education Commission, which was founded in 1948. "The Commission's goal was to establish universities that impart knowledge and wisdom for long-term growth. The Secondary Education Commission was founded in 1952" with the goals of offering a more comprehensive analysis of Indian educational issues and suggesting strategies for boosting productivity. According to the Commission's findings, technical institutions should be established using a uniform model throughout India, and high school curricula should be diversified.[9] Three main things need to happen for Indian education to undergo a complete overhaul, almost a revolution: internal reform, quality enhancement, and facility expansion.

The Education Commission's (1964–1966) recommendations served as the foundation for NPE, enacted in 1968. A proposal states that until age 14, "all children should have access to free and required schooling." Teachers with specialized training teach Hindi, English, and a local language in secondary school. Increasing national education spending to 6% of GDP The establishment of the "rural university" model, "Operation Blackboard," and "the 10+2+3 or 10+2+4 structure of the national compulsory education system were all components of the 1986 National Policy on Education, which focused on closing educational gaps and ensuring equal access to education."[10] A unified admission test for professional and technical programs in India was mandated by new regulations in 1992, and "the National Education Policy (NEP)" of 1986 was modified. This strategy is pushing for more drastic reforms in the Indian educational system, such as emphasizing the moral development of students and incorporating education into everyday life (Ranganathan, 2007). A new policy known as the "Common Minimum Program" was introduced in 2005. Following 1986, India's socioeconomic environment saw a significant shift, and it became evident that the country's educational system also needed to adapt. "The third National Education Policy 2020, which goes into effect in July 2020," will completely rewrite the preceding National Education Policy of 1986.

Reform of the Regulatory Framework:

Except for "medical and legal education, all higher education in India will be governed by the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)."[11] To guarantee that the many roles of finance, regulation, accreditation, and academic standard-setting are all fulfilled, the Higher Education Commission of India intends to establish four different verticals. The main guidelines and rules for each of the four regulatory layers are as follows:

1) Except for medical and legal education, the regulatory framework, comprised of "the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), is applied as a single regulator for the higher education sector. It will control excellent governance, financial integrity, and online and offline self-disclosure of all assets, personnel, infrastructure, audits, processes, courses, and learning objectives.
2) The second vertical of HECI is the National Accreditation Council (NAC); it will establish a robust system of graded accreditation as standards for all Higher Education Institutions to meet to attain quality, self-governance, and autonomy.
3) The third vertical is the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC)." It will handle financing and funding for higher education according to open standards, such as performance progress and institutionally established Institutional Development Plans (IDPs). "The Higher Education Grants Council" will be in charge of funding the creation of new emphasis areas, scholarships, and high-quality program offerings in various subjects and sectors at higher education institutions.
4) "The expected learning results for higher education programs, or graduate characteristics, shall be defined by the General Education Council (GEC). The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) will be developed and linked. The National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) will define higher education credentials leading to a degree, diploma, or certificate in terms of these learning objectives. Except for medical and legal education, the higher education sector is governed by the General Regulation Structure of the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC). 1) It will control excellent governance, financial integrity, and online and offline self-disclosure of all assets, personnel, infrastructure, audits, processes, courses, and learning objectives. 2) The second vertical of HECI is the National Accreditation Council (NAC); it will establish a robust system of graded accreditation as standards for all Higher Education Institutions to meet to attain quality, self-governance, and autonomy. 3) The third vertical is the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC)." It will handle financing and funding for higher education according to open standards, such as performance progress and institutionally established Institutional Development Plans (IDPs). "The Higher Education Grants Council" will be in charge of funding the creation of new emphasis areas, scholarships, and high-quality program offerings in various subjects and sectors at higher education institutions. 4) "The expected learning results for higher education programs, or "graduate characteristics," shall be defined by the General Education Council (GEC). The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) will be developed and linked. The National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) will define higher education credentials leading to a degree, diploma, or certificate in terms of these learning objectives."
5) The Board of Governors (BoG) will exist at every institution of higher learning. "Without the influence of politics or the outside world, this board will be able to make all nominations, including the appointment of the school president and all governance decisions."

6) The implementation of an "Academic Bank of Credit (ABC)" that emphasizes a "multidisciplinary approach to education" will enable the digital storage of academic credits obtained from a range of accredited higher education institutions. As a result, "degrees from higher education establishments will be granted based on credits obtained in several affluent nations."
7) "The National Research Foundation (NRF)" would be in charge of providing funds, providing guidance, and enhancing "the quality of research in India." Research laboratories and other research institutions, as well as a vibrant culture of research and innovation, will be supported and encouraged by the National Research Foundation. Funding for Indian researchers studying a variety of subjects, including those unrelated to science, is its primary goal. The National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), e-courses, and virtual labs were launched in eight regional languages.
8) "The National Testing Agency (NTA) will conduct a national Common Entrance Exam for university admissions. Whether or not to use the National Testing Agency's assessments in the admissions process is entirely up to the institution." One of its many potential advantages is that it will increase fairness and quality in education. At least twice a year, a standard aptitude test and associated exams will be administered.

Reforms in India's Higher Education System:

"The National Education Policy" of India seeks to create prominent, interdisciplinary universities and colleges from many universities, colleges, and other educational establishments. This would reduce the fragmentation of India's higher education system—the program called for the gradual elimination of single-stream higher education institutions. The undergraduate program will last three or four years, with other alternatives and certificates available to individuals who leave school early. "Depending on a student's bachelor's degree, postsecondary educational institutions may offer several master's degree programs. The number of master's programs available will be somewhat flexible. Students who have previously finished a three-year graduate degree program may opt for a two-year program. Research takes up the second year. Students who finish a four-year graduate degree with research can enroll in one-year or five-year bachelor's degrees. Master's A four-year bachelor's degree with research experience or a master's degree are prerequisites for the Ph.D. program. Teaching assistantships are one way PhD candidates get the necessary teaching experience."[12] Ph.D. programs will, therefore, change their focus. The higher education system will include professional and technical education.

Essential facilities and amenities should be available to higher education institutions, such as drinkable water, hygienic bathrooms, whiteboards, offices, teaching materials, libraries, labs, and cozy classrooms. The latest cutting-edge instructional technology will be available in every classroom, enabling improved learning opportunities. The top universities worldwide "would be allowed to open campuses in India and share the same rules on regulation, governance, and content as other independent Indian universities. The National Education Policy 2020" includes the following significant changes to the present educational system: [13]

1) Make sure that every district has at least one sizable, multidisciplinary university or college and that several HEIs in India provide programs in regional or Indian languages.
2) Making the switch "from a predetermined undergraduate curriculum to various courses."
3) Acknowledging the faculty's and the institution's independence.
4) It would be better for students and guarantee "that post-graduates have the information, skills, self-confidence, and entrepreneurial training they need to help society and the nation become more productive if the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student assistance were changed."
5) Reiterating the university's commitment to integrity in teaching, research, and leadership roles by appointing individuals based on merit and allowing them to advance in their careers via these activities.
6) Create a "National Research Foundation" to support research at colleges and universities and provide cash for studies that experts have assessed.
7) Improving higher education institutions' administrative and academic flexibility by appointing highly skilled, autonomous boards overseen by "a single higher education body."
8) Improving access, fairness, and inclusion using a range of tactics, such as private and charitable universities awarding scholarships to underprivileged students
9) Provide kids with special needs with accessible infrastructure and educational resources.
10) Open Distance Learning (ODL) and web-based education
11) New faculty development initiatives, senior faculty assistance programs, and programs to help new professors get started.
12) Peers, supervisors, and students may provide input on an individual's teaching, research, and practice contributions while assessing faculty members.
13) Curriculum modifications and student evaluation policies are left up to the discretion of educators.
14) Each student's performance score is determined by their performance since the grades they get for each subject are determined by the department's relevant faculty members based on continuing assessments.
15) Digitizing libraries supports the liberal education paradigm by providing staff and students with internet access to knowledge on any topic.
16) A large selection of specialized and transdisciplinary disciplines are available for students to choose from.
17) Completing at least one semester of social involvement throughout an undergraduate degree program exposes students to the issues facing the underprivileged and equips them for "a life of social responsibility."
18) "Encourage Indian higher education institutions to work with international educational establishments on twining, dual degree, faculty, student, and international research

collaborations; the establishment of Indian educational institutions' offshore campuses; and the establishment of the top 100 institutes in the world in India."

Reforms in the Teaching Sector:

"The national education policy promotes the use of fast-track promotion systems to acknowledge high-impact research and achievements," as well as well defined, impartial, and transparent methods and criteria for selecting academics. Tests to determine a person's eligibility as a teacher will include additional questions, and hiring decisions will be made based on the findings. It is often not possible for faculty members to transfer between various schools. They get a genuine sense of dedication, kinship, and investment in their school and community as a result. Faculty are free to design their own textbooks, course materials, assignments, testing procedures, and grading schemes within the authorized framework. Allowing teachers the latitude to instruct and mentor in novel ways will inspire them and showcase their inventiveness. The top academics with stellar service and academic records will be identified early on, trained, and given opportunities to advance up the leadership ladder. Positions of leadership can always be occupied. Instead, there need to be a transitional period when new leaders assume office to maintain institutions' seamless operation.

In today's competitive world, education must prioritize training and development in order to stay up with new technologies and other changes. By fortifying and greatly enlarging current "institutional arrangements and continuing endeavors to satisfy the demands of enhanced teaching-learning processes for high-quality education," the Policy aimed to enhance the abilities of teachers, who are essential to education. Teachers may enhance their knowledge and abilities by participating in online courses and seminars for professional development offered locally, regionally, state-wide, nationally, and internationally. They will be required to take part "in at least fifty hours of professional development activities annually." A significant number of exceptional senior or retired faculty members will be available to support new faculty members in their short- and long-term career development as part of a National Mentoring Mission.

Putting "teacher training in interdisciplinary colleges and universities with integrated four-year programs" and stringent curriculum and teaching methodology modifications is one of the finest approaches to enhance teaching. A B.Ed. It will be required for all instructors by 2030 to complete the degree in four years. The National Testing Agency will handle all applications for teacher training programs. The overall quality of education will rise if emphasis is placed on the effectiveness and calibre of instruction.

In summary:

"The National Education Policy is a bold and progressive strategy that calls for the motivation of educators, learners, and administrators to make a difference for a brighter future. Implementing policies is an issue in every industry."[14]To provide the most excellent education possible, a few tasks remain. More than any other industrialized nation, India has privatized higher education. It's time for the government to step in and implement new, more extensive education programs that will really produce human capital. "By establishing centers for start-ups, technological

development, frontier research, and cross-disciplinary research, including research in the social sciences, the higher education system must now prioritize research and innovation above all else."[15] More industry-academic links are required between industry and all higher education institutions in order to alleviate students' concerns about placement, since it is becoming more challenging "to find a job that fits their credentials in today's competitive market." Because they constitute a significant contributing factor to the decline in educational quality, concerns about higher education institutions located in areas with high levels of noise pollution and limited space for basic amenities should be taken into consideration. Aithal & Aithal, (2020)[15] say that several successful models in industrialized nations may also be employed to modify the educational system to meet the demands of a nation. Additionally, it is dependent on the states or regions, each of which has a varied population and range of amenities. Everyone involved in the higher education system has to be dedicated and able to implement any plans created by national Policy.

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