

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND THE STATE OF NIGERIA'S ECONOMY IN SUSTAINING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

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Abstract

The sustainability of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes in Nigeria is closely tied to political ideology and the state of the nation's economic development. This paper explores how political and economic factors influence the capacity of ECCE to meet the development needs of children, particularly in fostering cognitive, physical, emotional and social growth. It highlights the roles of key stakeholders – governments, private sector, non-governmental organization (NGOs), educators, parents, and the community – in ensuring the successful implementation and sustainability of ECCE programmes. The government is responsible in policy formulation and funding, private sector involvement in quality service delivery, and the critical roles of NGOs in underserved areas are examined. The paper also discussed the challenges in sustaining best practices in ECCE, including inadequate funding, lack of trained educators and socio-economic disparities and offers solutions for overcoming these challenges. By addressing these issues and promoting collaboration among stakeholders, Nigeria can create a robust and sustainable ECCE system that fosters long-term child development. The recommendations provided aim to enhance the efficiency of ECCE programmes, making them more inclusive and accessible to all Nigerian children, especially in marginalized regions. The early childhood education is a right and should be recognized as such by parents, governments and all stakeholders.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Political Ideology, Economic Development, Sustainability, Stakeholders, Policy, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), child development.

Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is critical for the holistic development of young children, shaping their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth. In Nigeria, ECCE programmes are recognized as a key strategy for achieving sustainable development. However, the economic situation and political ideologies shaping policies significantly impact the sustainability of these programmes. This paper examines how political ideology and Nigeria's economic condition influence the sustainability of ECCE, considering the role of stakeholders, challenges, and strategies for long-term success.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is globally acknowledged as a foundation for lifelong learning and development, playing a critical role in shaping a child's future. In Nigeria, ECCE is considered essential for fostering cognitive, social, and emotional development during the formative years, which significantly influences future educational

outcomes and contributions to society. The Nigerian government has recognized the importance of ECCE by incorporating it into national education policies and development plans, such as the National Policy on Education (2020) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), which emphasize inclusive and equitable quality education.

However, the sustainability of these programmes remains a significant challenge, largely due to political and economic factors. Political ideology, which shapes the policies enacted by governing parties, directly influences the allocation of resources for education, including ECCE. In Nigeria, the government's approach to education funding has fluctuated with changes in political leadership and economic conditions, affecting the consistency and quality of ECCE services. For instance, during periods of economic recession, as Nigeria experienced between 2016 and 2017 and during the COVID-19 pandemic, budget allocations for education, particularly for early childhood, were significantly reduced, impacting the operational efficiency of ECCE centres (Olanrewaju & Ibrahim, 2023).

Economic development is another critical factor affecting the sustainability of ECCE in Nigeria. A stable and growing economy allows for increased investment in social services, including education. In contrast, economic downturns often lead to austerity measures, which disproportionately affect sectors like education. For ECCE programmes to be sustained, adequate funding, infrastructure, and human resources are required. Yet, the Nigerian economy, heavily relied on oil exports, is vulnerable to global price fluctuations, which in turn affect the government's ability to consistently fund these programmes (Adewuyi & Babalola, 2023).

Moreover, the political landscape in Nigeria is characterized by frequent shifts in ideology, from socialist to neoliberal economic models, resulting in inconsistent policy implementation. These ideological shifts, coupled with economic volatility, create challenges for the long-term sustainability of ECCE programmes, as funding and policy priorities change with different political administrations. The privatization of some ECCE services, driven by neoliberal ideologies, has also led to inequality in access, where wealthier families can afford better services, while children from low-income families are left behind (Akinyemi, 2022). This paper aims to explore the intersection of political ideology and economic conditions in sustaining ECCE programmes in Nigeria. It will examine the roles of stakeholders, challenges faced in maintaining best practices, and propose solutions to ensure the continued growth and sustainability of ECCE, particularly in the face of changing political and economic landscapes.

Concept of Political Ideology and Economic Development

Political ideology refers to the set of beliefs, values, and ideas that shape how a government approaches governance and policy-making, including education. In Nigeria, political ideologies have played a critical role in determining how the state manages resources, prioritizes sectors like education, and addresses societal challenges. Political parties and governments in Nigeria have shifted between various ideologies, such as socialism, neoliberalism, and mixed economies, each influencing education funding and policies in different ways.

During Nigeria's post-independence era, a socialist-leaning ideology influenced education policies, with the government heavily involved in the provision of public education services. This period was marked by significant government investment in education, including

ECCE, with the view that public education was a national priority for fostering economic development and national unity (Akeem & Salihu, 2023). The socialist perspective emphasized state control and financing of social services, which helped to establish a foundation for ECCE during the early stages of Nigeria's development.

However, starting from the 1980s, Nigeria embraced neoliberal economic policies under the influence of global financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These policies prioritized free-market principles, leading to the privatization of many sectors, including education. Neoliberalism advocates for reduced government involvement in social services and promotes private sector participation. As a result, education, including ECCE, became increasingly market-driven, with a shift from state-funded programmes to private provision, leading to disparities in access and quality (Akinyemi, 2022).

This ideological shift towards neoliberalism significantly affected the sustainability of ECCE programmes. The government's reduced role in direct funding of education meant that ECCE centres, particularly in rural and underserved areas, suffered from underfunding and lack of adequate resources. Private ECCE institutions, which thrived in urban areas, were often expensive, making them inaccessible to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The unequal distribution of resources across different socio-economic groups became a key challenge for achieving universal early childhood education in Nigeria (Oluwaseun & Balogun, 2022).

Economic development, on the other hand, is the process by which a country improves the economic well-being and quality of life of its citizens. In Nigeria, economic development has been driven largely by oil revenues, which account for a substantial portion of government income. However, Nigeria's dependence on oil has made its economy vulnerable to external shocks, such as fluctuations in global oil prices. These economic fluctuations have a direct impact on government spending on education, including ECCE programmes. For instance, during periods of economic recession, such as the oil price crash of 2016, government revenues fell, resulting in budget cuts for social services like education (Umeh, 2021).

Furthermore, political instability and corruption have compounded the challenges of sustainable economic development in Nigeria. The mismanagement of public resources, coupled with frequent changes in government, has led to inconsistent policy implementation. Each administration often introduces new policies, which sometimes leads to the abandonment of previously successful ECCE programmes. Political ideologies that prioritize short-term political gains over long-term investments in education further undermine the sustainability of ECCE programmes (Adewuyi & Babalola, 2023).

In summary, political ideology and economic development are closely linked in determining the sustainability of ECCE in Nigeria. While socialist-leaning policies historically prioritized state-funded education, neoliberal policies shifted the focus towards privatization, leading to disparities in access to ECCE services. Nigeria's economic development, influenced by global oil markets and internal political instability, continues to impact the ability of the government to consistently fund and sustain ECCE programmes.

Child Growth Needs for Sustainability

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) focuses on addressing the holistic development

needs of children, which are essential for their overall growth and future success. For sustainability, ECCE programmes must cater to a wide range of developmental domains, including physical health, cognitive abilities, emotional well-being, and social skills. These needs are foundational for preparing children for formal education and enabling them to become productive members of society. The early years of a child's life, particularly from birth to age five, are critical for brain development, and the quality of care and education during this period has long-term implications for individual and societal progress (Udo, 2023).

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development refers to the process by which children acquire knowledge, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking abilities. High-quality ECCE programmes provide stimulating environments that encourage exploration, curiosity, and learning through play. These programmes incorporate educational materials and activities that promote literacy, numeracy, and reasoning skills. In Nigeria, where literacy rates among young children remain a concern, providing ECCE centres with the resources to support cognitive development is essential for improving school readiness and long-term academic performance (Adeyemi & Olawale, 2022).

Studies show that children who attend well-resourced ECCE programmes demonstrate better school performance and have higher chances of completing their education (Eze & Ekanem, 2023). However, many ECCE centres in Nigeria, especially in rural and underserved communities, lack adequate instructional materials and trained teachers. This gap in quality hinders the cognitive development of children and widens the educational divide between urban and rural areas.

Physical Health and Nutrition

Physical growth is another critical aspect of child development that must be supported for sustainable outcomes. ECCE programmes need to ensure that children have access to proper nutrition, healthcare, and physical activities that promote healthy development. Malnutrition, which remains a significant issue in parts of Nigeria, negatively affects children's cognitive abilities and physical health, leading to developmental delays and poor academic outcomes (Adamu & Musa, 2023).

Nutrition plays a crucial role in brain development during early childhood. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), nearly 37% of children under five in Nigeria suffer from chronic malnutrition (stunting), which can impair cognitive function and learning capacity. Sustainable ECCE programmes must incorporate feeding schemes or partnerships with health services to ensure children receive adequate nutrition and medical care. Moreover, providing safe and stimulating physical environments that promote active play and motor skill development is essential for supporting children's overall health (UNICEF, 2023).

Emotional and Social Development

Emotional and social development in early childhood involves learning to manage emotions, build relationships, and develop social competencies. These are critical for children's ability to interact effectively with others and succeed in group settings, such as school. ECCE programmes provide children with opportunities to practice social skills like cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution, which are essential for their social integration and emotional

well-being.

A key component of sustainable ECCE is fostering emotional security by creating a supportive and nurturing environment. This involves having caring, well-trained educators who can attend to children's emotional needs and model positive social behavior. In Nigeria, where many children experience stress due to socio-economic challenges or conflict, ECCE programmes that prioritize emotional and social development can serve as stabilizing environments that promote resilience (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2022).

Language Development

Language development is a critical area that directly influences literacy and communication skills. ECCE programmes play a significant role in exposing children to rich language environments, which are crucial for the development of vocabulary, speech, and comprehension. Studies show that children who receive language stimulation in early childhood are better equipped for reading and writing when they enter primary school. Sustainable ECCE programmes should ensure that children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have access to educators who can facilitate language-rich interactions (Oladipo, 2023).

Inclusive Education for Special Needs

For ECCE programmes to be truly sustainable, they must also accommodate children with special needs, providing inclusive environments where every child can thrive regardless of their abilities. In Nigeria, there are limited provisions for children with disabilities in ECCE centres, which further marginalizes these children. Sustainable programmes must address this gap by training teachers in special education and providing the necessary resources to support the diverse developmental needs of all children (Okoro & Nwachukwu, 2023).

The Role of Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers are central to the sustainability of child development efforts in ECCE. They are the primary caregivers and educators of their children in the early years. Therefore, ECCE programmes must involve parents in the learning process, equipping them with knowledge on how to support their children's growth at home. Parental involvement has been shown to enhance children's academic performance and social development, and ECCE centres should foster partnerships with families to create a holistic support system for the child (Adesina & Thomas, 2023).

In summary, for ECCE programmes to sustainably support child development, they must address children's physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and language development needs. By ensuring access to quality resources, trained educators, and inclusive learning environments, these programmes can help children achieve their full potential, contributing to broader societal progress.

Responsibilities of Stakeholders

The sustainability of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes in Nigeria depends on the active involvement and commitment of various stakeholders, including the

government, private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educators, parents, and the community. Each of these stakeholders plays a vital role in ensuring that ECCE programmes are well-resourced, accessible, and able to meet the holistic developmental needs of children. Their collective efforts determine the long-term success and sustainability of these initiatives.

- 1) **Government:** The government holds the primary responsibility for setting policies, standards, and frameworks that guide ECCE programmes in Nigeria. At both the federal and state levels, the government is expected to establish clear policies for ECCE, ensure adequate funding, and oversee the implementation of these programmes. The National Policy on Education (2020) emphasizes the importance of ECCE as part of Nigeria's broader educational goals, highlighting the government's commitment to early childhood development (NPE, 2020). However, the sustainability of ECCE programmes requires consistent financial investment from the government, particularly in infrastructure, teacher training, and instructional materials.

The government must also ensure that ECCE programmes adhere to international standards, such as those set by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), which prioritize inclusive and equitable quality education for all children. Regulatory bodies, such as the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), are tasked with monitoring ECCE centres to ensure compliance with educational standards and safeguarding the welfare of children (Olorunfemi & Adeyemi, 2023). Additionally, governments need to collaborate with international organizations and donors to mobilize additional resources for ECCE, especially in underserved areas.

- 2) **Private Sector:** The private sector plays an increasingly important role in providing ECCE services, particularly in urban areas where private schools and daycare centres have proliferated. Private sector involvement is often driven by market forces, leading to higher quality services in some cases but also creating disparities in access based on socio-economic status (Akinyemi, 2022). Private ECCE providers are responsible for delivering high-quality early childhood education and ensuring that their services align with national standards set by the government. They are also expected to invest in teacher training, curriculum development, and child-friendly facilities to promote effective learning environments.

In addition to running ECCE centres, private organizations can contribute to the sustainability of ECCE by partnering with the government and NGOs to support public programmes. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, for example, can provide financial assistance, infrastructure development, and learning materials for government-run ECCE centres, especially in disadvantaged communities. Such partnerships can bridge funding gaps and improve the quality of public ECCE services (Okeke & Olawale, 2023).

- 3) **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for ECCE, providing services, and supplementing government efforts, particularly in underserved rural areas. These organizations often focus on capacity building for educators, child health, nutrition, and inclusive education for children with special needs. NGOs such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children have been active in promoting early childhood education in Nigeria through initiatives that improve access to ECCE for marginalized populations (UNICEF, 2023). NGOs also serve as watchdogs, holding governments accountable for their commitments to ECCE and ensuring that resources are used effectively. They often conduct research and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood education, while also providing data and recommendations to inform policy development. In some cases, NGOs directly manage ECCE centres, particularly in conflict-affected areas or regions where government presence is limited (Adesina, 2023).
- 4) **Educators:** Teachers and caregivers are on the frontline of delivering quality ECCE services. Their role is central to child development, as they provide the daily instruction and care that form the foundation of children's learning and socialization. The sustainability of ECCE depends on the continuous professional development of educators, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills to foster holistic child growth, including cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development. Unfortunately, many ECCE centres in Nigeria face a shortage of trained professionals, particularly in rural areas (Oluwaseun & Balogun, 2022). Educators are responsible for creating inclusive learning environments, promoting play-based learning, and addressing the diverse needs of children. They also collaborate with parents and the community to ensure that children receive consistent support both at home and at school. Ongoing teacher training and support are crucial to maintaining high-quality ECCE services, and governments must invest in teacher education programmes to address this need (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2022).
- 5) **Parents and Caregivers:** Parents and caregivers are the primary educators of young children and play a fundamental role in supporting their development at home. They are responsible for ensuring that their children attend ECCE programmes and for reinforcing the learning that occurs in those settings. Parental involvement in ECCE is associated with improved cognitive and emotional outcomes for children, as engaged parents are more likely to create a stimulating home environment that promotes early learning (Adesina & Thomas, 2023). In Nigeria, parental involvement can be challenging due to socio-economic factors, such as poverty or low literacy levels among parents, which may limit their ability to support their children's education. ECCE programmes need to actively involve parents by providing them with the tools and knowledge to support their children's development. Workshops, parent-teacher meetings, and community outreach initiatives can help bridge the gap between the school and the home, fostering a more integrated approach to child

development (Oluwaseun & Balogun, 2022).

- 6) **The Community:** The broader community also plays a vital role in sustaining ECCE programmes. Community members can provide support through volunteer efforts, donations, and advocacy for better education policies. In rural areas, where formal government support for ECCE may be limited, the community can mobilize resources to establish local ECCE centres and ensure that children have access to early education. Traditional and religious leaders are also influential in promoting the value of ECCE within the community and encouraging parental participation (Adamu & Musa, 2023).

In summary, the sustainability of ECCE in Nigeria depends on the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders. The government must provide the policy framework and funding, the private sector must ensure quality and accessibility, NGOs must supplement government efforts, educators need proper training, and parents must be involved in supporting their children's learning. By working together, these stakeholders can ensure that ECCE programmes are sustainable and able to meet the developmental needs of all Nigerian children.

Political Ideology and the Sustainability of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programmes

Political ideology significantly influences the sustainability of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes by shaping government policies, resource allocation, and the overall educational framework. Political leaders' beliefs and approaches to governance determine whether ECCE is prioritized, adequately funded, and integrated into national development strategies. Different political ideologies—ranging from socialism, liberalism, and conservatism to neoliberalism—affect the extent to which the government intervenes in and supports early childhood education.

1. **Government Commitment to ECCE and Political Ideology:** The extent to which ECCE is sustained in Nigeria depends largely on the political will of the ruling government, which is guided by its ideology. Governments that adopt a social democratic approach tend to view education, including ECCE, as a public good that requires significant government investment (Obanya, 2023). In contrast, neoliberal governments emphasize private sector participation, often reducing public funding and shifting responsibilities to individuals and private entities (Akinyemi & Olayemi, 2023).

In Nigeria, policies such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) 2020 and the Universal Basic Education Act (UBE) 2004 have shaped the framework for ECCE. However, inconsistent political ideologies across administrations have led to fluctuating levels of commitment and funding for early childhood education. For instance, some administrations have increased budgetary allocations for education, recognizing ECCE as a fundamental right, while others have deprioritized it due to competing economic interests or shifts towards privatization (Ogunyemi, 2022).

2. **Policy Formulation and Implementation in ECCE:** Political ideologies influence whether policies supporting ECCE are effectively implemented. A government with a progressive or welfare-oriented ideology is more likely to support universal access to early childhood

education, emphasizing inclusivity, free education, and equity (UNICEF, 2023). Conversely, administrations with a conservative or market-driven ideology may prioritize cost-sharing mechanisms, where ECCE is mainly financed by parents and private investors, reducing government intervention (Adesina & Thomas, 2023).

In Nigeria, political instability and policy discontinuity have negatively impacted ECCE sustainability. The frequent change of governments, each with its own ideological stance, has led to the abandonment of some ECCE programmes and inconsistent funding structures. For instance, while some administrations have supported free ECCE programmes, others have introduced policies that limit government expenditure on early childhood education (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2022).

3. Public Funding and Budgetary Allocation: One of the primary ways political ideology sustains or hinders ECCE is through budgetary allocation. Governments that adhere to egalitarian principles tend to allocate more resources to education, ensuring that public ECCE centres are well-equipped and accessible to all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Okeke & Olawale, 2023). On the other hand, governments favoring fiscal conservatism may argue for reducing state intervention, leading to lower budgetary allocations and increased dependence on private funding (Olorunfemi & Adeyemi, 2023).

In Nigeria, the budgetary allocation to education has often been below the UNESCO-recommended 15–20% of national budgets, affecting the sustainability of ECCE programmes (UNESCO, 2023). The ideological stance of political leaders determines whether these recommendations are met or neglected. For example, progressive administrations have attempted to increase ECCE funding through initiatives such as the Early Childhood Development Programme under the UBE Act, while others have cut funding due to economic constraints or ideological opposition to state-funded education (Ogunyemi, 2022).

4. Inclusivity and Equity in ECCE: Political ideology also affects the inclusivity of ECCE programmes. Governments with a socially inclusive ideology prioritize marginalized groups, ensuring that children from rural areas, low-income families, and children with disabilities have access to quality ECCE (Adamu & Musa, 2023). However, administrations influenced by elitist or exclusionary ideologies may focus on urban-based ECCE programmes while neglecting rural and disadvantaged communities.

For example, in some states in Nigeria, ECCE programmes are primarily available in urban centers, while rural areas suffer from inadequate infrastructure and teaching personnel. This disparity is a direct consequence of policy decisions influenced by political ideology, where governments with a stronger commitment to social justice have implemented targeted interventions to bridge these gaps (Akinyemi, 2022).

5. Political Stability and Long-Term Planning for ECCE: Political stability is essential for sustaining ECCE programmes. Countries with strong political institutions and consistent ideologies are more likely to implement long-term educational policies that support ECCE. However, in Nigeria, frequent government transitions, coupled with ideological shifts, have led to policy discontinuities that hinder ECCE growth. A new administration may abandon or

modify previous ECCE policies based on its ideology, causing setbacks in educational development (Oluwaseun & Balogun, 2022).

For instance, some Nigerian states have experimented with public-private partnerships (PPPs) in ECCE, influenced by neoliberal ideologies, only for subsequent administrations to reverse these policies in favor of state-funded ECCE programmes (Okeke & Olawale, 2023). Such inconsistencies disrupt progress, leading to inefficiencies in early childhood education delivery.

By conclusion Political ideology plays a crucial role in shaping and sustaining ECCE programmes in Nigeria. Whether through funding, policy formulation, inclusivity measures, or long-term planning, the ideological stance of political leaders determines the effectiveness of ECCE implementation. To ensure sustainability, there must be a non-partisan commitment to ECCE, with policies insulated from political shifts. A stable and well-funded ECCE system requires political will, inclusive governance, and a long-term vision that prioritizes early childhood education as a fundamental pillar of national development.

Challenges in Sustaining ECCE Best Practices

Several challenges hinder the sustainability of ECCE best practices in Nigeria, including:

- i. **Inconsistent Funding:** A significant challenge is the lack of consistent funding. ECCE programmes are often the first to suffer from budget cuts during economic recessions, leading to inadequate infrastructure and resources (Umeh, 2021).
- ii. **Low Teacher Motivation:** Many ECCE educators face poor working conditions, low wages, and insufficient training opportunities, leading to high turnover rates (Abubakar, 2022).
- iii. **Political Instability:** Changes in government can lead to policy reversals, affecting the continuity of ECCE programmes. Political instability creates an uncertain environment for long-term educational planning.
- iv. **Cultural and Social Barriers:** In some communities, cultural beliefs and practices hinder the participation of children, especially girls, in formal ECCE programmes.

Solutions/Way Forward to Challenges in Sustaining ECCE Best Practices

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach:

- i. **Increased Government Investment:** The government must prioritize ECCE in budget allocations, ensuring that centres are adequately funded to meet children's developmental needs.
- ii. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration with private entities and NGOs can provide additional resources and expertise to improve ECCE delivery.
- iii. **Teacher Development and Incentives:** Increasing wages, offering professional development opportunities, and improving working conditions for ECCE teachers can reduce turnover and enhance teaching quality.
- iv. **Policy Stability:** Ensuring policy continuity, regardless of political changes, will help sustain ECCE programmes and allow long-term planning and implementation.
- v. **Community Engagement:** Raising awareness about the importance of ECCE, particularly in marginalized communities, can help overcome cultural and social barriers.

Conclusion

The sustainability of ECCE programmes in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the nation's political ideology and economic stability. While significant strides have been made in establishing ECCE centres and policies, the fluctuating political landscape and economic challenges present ongoing obstacles. It is crucial for the government and stakeholders to remain committed to supporting ECCE initiatives to ensure the long-term development and well-being of Nigerian children.

Recommendations

To sustain ECCE best practices in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

- Allocate at least 20% of the national budget to education, with a specific focus on ECCE.
- Establish long-term policies that transcend political administrations, ensuring the continuity and growth of ECCE programmes.
- Provide financial incentives and professional development for ECCE educators to attract and retain qualified teachers.
- Promote community-based ECCE centres, particularly in rural areas, to address cultural and economic barriers to early childhood education.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the implementation and effectiveness of ECCE programmes across the country.

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