Issues in Moroccan Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Historically, education has always been the springboard for socio-economic development of nations. Undoubtedly, education proved to be the catalyst of change and the front wagon that drives with it all the other wagons pertaining to other dynamic sectors. In effect, the role of education can be seen to provide pupils with the curriculum and hidden curriculum skills alike; teaching skills that will prepare them physically, mentally and socially for the world of work in later life. In Morocco, the country spends over 26% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education. Unfortunately, though this number is important, Moroccan education (primary, secondary and higher education alike) still suffers from the mismatch between the state expenditures on education and the general product in reality. In this article, an attempt is made to touch on some relevant issues pertaining to higher education with special reference to Morocco. First, it provides some tentative definitions, mission and functions of university and higher education. Second, it gives a historical sketch of the major reforms that took place in Morocco as well as the major changes pertaining to these reforms respectively. Third, it provides a general overview of the history of higher education in Morocco, it also tackles an issue related to governance in higher education which is cost sharing. Fourth, it delves into the history of English Language Teaching (ELT), lists some characteristics of the English Departments in Morocco. Fifth, it discusses the issue of private vs. public higher education. Last, but not least, it tackles the issue of Brain Drain.

1. Introduction

Moroccan higher education witnessed many ups and downs since Morocco obtained its independence from the French colonizer in 1956. In this regard, many reforms have taken place in the country with an ultimate aim to enhance the productivity of the educational system as well as reduce the already wide gaps between the educated elite and the uneducated masses. As it is the case in almost all third world countries, Morocco is no exception. Indeed, many reforms and reform of the reforms have taken place in the country but still the results don't seem to match the effort exerted by the government. In this article, light will be shed on the Moroccan higher education in terms of costs, reforms, and other relevant issues that I deem important and thus urgent measures should be put forward by the government to curb them.

Historically, William Van Humboldt was the first one to coin the phrase '*idea of the university*'. The Humboldian University became a model for the rest of Europe because of its principle of the 'union of teaching and research (Andersron, 2010). Later on, John Henry Newman defines university as the "place of teaching universal knowledge, in which specialized training was subordinate to the pursuit of a liberal education." (Ibid). Oakeshott (2003:24) stretches further the definition of university being as "a number of people engaged in a certain sort of activity: the middle ages called it stadium; we may call it 'the pursuit of *learning*'. The university is characterized by: First, special manner in the pursuit of learning; second, the pursuit of learning as cooperative enterprise; last, university as a home of learning where the tradition of learning is preserved and extended (Ibid).

In England, the Robbins-Oxbridge model severed the ties with the aristocratic, elitist Victorian university. As a consequence, notions such as 'autonomy' and 'academic freedom' appeared. This idea had two aspects. (1) Individual scholars should be free to pursue the truth to teach

and publish their findings. (2) The university should enjoy autonomy from the coercive attitudes of the church and other political entities (Anderson, 2010).

However, the idea of the university is totally different from that of higher education. The university is an aspect that is included in higher education. The latter is geared towards specialized knowledge such as engineering, vocational education which offers experience for certain jobs, technology, medical schools, etc. Another trait of higher education institutions particularly vocational institutions is that they are accessed without Placement Tests (PT) or a high school certificate. Furthermore, higher education institutions are not compulsory, attendance is optional; however, being voluntary results in learners' discontinuity of their studies usually in form of a gap year.

Oakeshott (2003) lists three classes of people who constitute the backbone of university, viz. Undergraduates, scholars and teachers. Each class is engaged in the mission of pursuit of learning. First, the undergraduates are those who are not beginners, have had their share of experience, and are not ready to be spoon-fed in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. They are autonomous learners whose experience has many outcomes. According to (Ouakrime, 1996: 356), the outcome of students' experience of higher education is first, the accumulation of factual and experiential knowledge. Second, students' development of a set of information, mental, action skills, and social skills (Carter, 1985 as cited in Ouakrime, Ibid). Third, students' experience in higher education may result in personal qualities such as broad mindedness, imagination, creativity and critical thinking skills. Fourth, attitudes which students may develop implicitly from the hidden curriculum as well as values such as tolerance towards other cultures, mutual respect of differences and hard-work. (Ibid). The second category is the scholars who work as researchers but scarcely as teachers. "A scholar is something more than a picker-up of unconsidered trifles" (Oakeshott, 2003: 25). The scholars' mission is to do research in order to develop the country. The scholar is also the one who knows how to engage in the activity of learning, he does not preach his insights, rather he creates knowledge. Last, teachers, "Humboldt attempted to define the role of the teacher in higher education as a research supervisor, no longer a simple imparter of knowledge" (Cemmell, n.d.)

In short, the idea of university and its mission in recent years have got mixed up with notions such as 'higher education', 'advanced training', and 'refreshed courses for adults ' which have little to do with the idea of university. For the former ideas, they belong to the world of power and utility, of activity, and this is not the world to which the university belongs. Therefore, it is better to see the idea of the university not as fixed set of characteristics, but as a set of tensions between teaching and research, autonomy and accountability, and between serving the economy and providing a space free from utilitarian pressures. (Anderson, 2010)

2. Higher Education in Morocco/ Cost Sharing

2.1 History of Higher Education in Morocco

Ouakrime (2003: 450) provides a comprehensive overview of the Moroccan higher education development. In this regard, three main factors have influenced the development of institutions of higher education in Morocco which are: Historically, the French colonialism put the first foundations of higher education institutions in terms of organization. Politically, there was the introduction of the Arabization policies. Economically, there was a need for higher education institutions to cater for the growing requirements of the Moroccan economy. Morocco prides itself on having the oldest university in the world that is Al Quarawiyin University (859) which is the repository of Arab-Islamic heritage. In addition to this, there are three major types of higher education institutions in Morocco. First, the public institutions which are characterized by free access but less sophisticated facilities, less state expenditures, etc. Second, the newer public ones, "established in the mid-1980s with the purpose of absorbing the ever-growing number of students and implementing a policy of relative decentralization" Ouakrime (Ibid). Third, the semi-public, non-for-profit institutions in which Al- Akhawayn University is the only one at present in Morocco which is modeled after the American university system, both organizationally and pedagogically. Furthermore, the private sector which is flourishing now in Morocco is represented by newly established institutions, the government relies primarily on this sector to relieve the burden of public higher education and to offer more diverse learning and training opportunities. Thus, contributing to the socio-economic development of the

country (Ibid).

2.2 Cost sharing in Higher Education

Due to the high students' ratio and the limited resources, the crisis has negatively influenced the quality of teaching and research. To get out of this impasse, cost sharing appears to be the most suitable solution for the ills that plague the Moroccan higher education institutions. Cost sharing in higher education is a policy which postulates that costs of higher education should be shared between the government, parents, students and/or donor organizations. According to Albach and Johnstone (1993), "cost sharing is the shift of the burden of higher education costs from being totally borne by the government or the taxpayer, to being shared with parents and students." (Cited in Ait Si Mhamed, 2004: 3). This is because the governments cannot afford to fully finance the increasing numbers of students pursuing higher education.

2.1.1.Rationales for Cost Sharing

The rationales of introducing cost sharing in higher education are as follow: First, the sheer need for another revenue than the governmental one. Second, equity which is based on the view that who benefit should share the cost with the government or the tax payer. Third, the neo-liberal economic theory that tuition allows some virtues of the market in higher education. (Johnstone, 2002 cited in Ait Si Mhamed, Ibid).

2.1.2.Categories of Educational Costs

There are at least four categories of educational costs. First, costs of faculty and staff salaries, equipment and technology. Second, costs of sponsored research. Third, costs of students living. Fourth, the costs of forgone earnings. (Altbach and Johnstone,1993 as cited in Ait Si Mhamed, 2004: 3). Cost sharing vary from full tuition, nearly break, or full cost fees (Ibid: 8). However, this policy of freezing grants or reducing their value has had negative impact on enrolment rates, higher attrition rates especially among rural females or those coming from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

All in all, though the policy of cost sharing seeks to reach a quality education for all, the very implementation of it seems to be deficient in terms of governance and equity between different universities and among departments of the same university. This policy has received staunch opposition in Morocco due to some cultural, ideological and economic reasons. So, the limitations of cost sharing in Morocco seem to hamper access to higher education since there is a dire need for a complete and fair cost sharing so as to have a quality education for all.

3. Reforms in Higher Education in Morocco

3.1. Background and Definition of Reform

The Moroccan higher education has been suffering from a structural crisis (Chiheb, 2014). This crisis can be explained by some conclusions shared by the community of professors and researchers, by students and by foreign observers as to the quality of the educational offer, the employability of graduates and the scientific position of Moroccan universities vis-à-vis the professional world (Ibid). Hence comes the urgent need for an educational reform. According to Oxford English Dictionary, "reform means the improvement or amendment of what is wrong, corrupt, or unsatisfactory".

3.2.Rationales behind Reform

The rationales behind introducing reform in higher education are as follow: First, the growing dissatisfaction with the previous reforms. Second, the obsolete mission of the university which used to form employees for the government and civil servants to replace the departed expatriates. Third, the obsolete practices in terms of course content, purposes, methodology and assessment which are no longer conforming to the latest theories in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. Fourth, the inconsistency of higher education practices with learners' needs, styles, learning strategies etc. Fifth, the inconsistency with job market's needs in terms of providing job market with skillful and qualified workers though this rationale was criticized by Tucker (2012: 2) who opines that narrow vocational training creates unemployment by producing workers who can do only one thing. Last but not least, the need to foster critical thinking skills among students in terms of argumentation in presentations, public speaking and writing alike. All the aforementioned rationales made it primordial to reform the Moroccan higher education.

3.3.Past Reforms in Moroccan Higher Education

Ouakrime (2003, 1996: 453) opines that "higher education in Morocco has undergone reforms initiated at different periods of crisis when the need was felt to introduce changes meant to contribute to the development of the university or to solve problems in the educational system". Reform was first initiated in 1975 with an aim to move the system of higher education away from the rigid, bureaucratic, and undemocratic model inherited from the colonial era. (Ibid). A second attempt to

introduce reform was carried out in 1981. It emphasized the need to introduce changes in the programs and assessment system. The third attempt to reform the Moroccan system of higher education started in 1992. However, the main reform was the one initiated within the national education charter 1999. According to Ouakrime (Ibid), "the main aim of this reform is to set up a system of higher education that is flexible enough to adapt to the rapid changes brought about by the process of globalization". The main bases of this reform process are License- - Master-Doctorate system(LMD), the right for students to appeal for an extra year, modularization, continuous evaluation, validation, compensation between modules, flexibility in terms of orientation and re-orientation of students, accreditation, the National Book of pedagogical norms(Kouhlani, 2011: 13). However, this LMD system was criticized by Chiheb (2014) who states that "the transposition of the LMD reform to the university was made more for the upgrading qualifications, rather than be focused on a logical structure of educational training, it is a bad copy paste".

All in all, reform of higher education in Morocco was all the time a top-down process. However, for any reform to be effective and efficient, it must be a bottom-up process accounting for all the stakeholders, namely the students who are the targeted groups by reform. Sadly enough, students' opinions and concerns are hardly taken into account while drafting reforms. Teachers also are major players in the field who should be involved whenever there is an urgent call for reform. Indubitably, teachers' rich, invaluable experience and thoughtful insights could be of great help to reformists.

4. English Language Teaching (ELT) in Higher Education in Morocco

4.1. Status of English Language Teaching in Morocco

English is rapidly growing in status and usage throughout Morocco. Currently, English is taught in secondary and tertiary level of the public education system (Buckner, 2011: 218). English is supported for its instrumental value as a means of communication with other nations and its importance for the Moroccan economy. English also enjoys much cultural prestige, encouraging intrinsic motivation. French, on the other hand also still enjoys a higher status among Moroccans who aspire to climb the social ladder. However, due to its wide support, many believe that "French, is giving up a lot of territory for English" in Morocco and Arab North Africa generally" (Zughol,

2002: 145 as cited in Buckner: 219). In the same vein, Buckner (Ibid) argues that unlike French and Spanish, English does not have a colonial legacy in Morocco and in fact, seems to represent something different, a language of opportunity. English is still considered "the lesser of two evils" (Ibid). In a study conducted in 1991 by Fatima Sadiqi, 87% of Moroccans seem to welcome the idea of seeing English spread in the country. (Cited in Buckner, Ibid).

4.2. Growth and Characteristics of English Departments in Morocco

In the institutional level, English started in high schools before it reached higher education. According to Ouakrime (1986: 2), "the first established university department was in Rabat, one from which other departments off-shooted, namely, the Faculty of Arts in Fez". Later on, Morocco witnessed a surge in English Departments all over the country which had a positive impact on the quality and quantity of English graduates. The number of Departments of English has gone up from two in 1973 to six in 1984. (Ibid). English started in higher education as a means to gain information in other disciplines. In this regard, Weiss (1996: 251) states that "*The English Department has become service- oriented department"*, since most of the readings in other Departments are originally written in English.

The distinguishing characteristics of the English Departments are numerous according to (Ouakrime, 1986: 6). First, the different nationalities and backgrounds, both academic and pedagogic of members of staff make of the Departments of English a melting-pot. Second, the disciplines taught and staff have contributed to the democratization of the English Departments. Third, as far as aims, content, and assessment are concerned, they are in fact the prerogative of the stakeholders directly concerned, viz. teachers, administrators and students. Ouakrime (Ibid) asserts that "members of staff make what they think are appropriate decisions about course objectives and content, and adopt the teaching strategies they perceive as relevant." Last, English stands out to be the only medium of instruction in the English Departments, students use the language inside and even outside the walls of the classroom.

4.3. Factors behind the Growth of ELT in Morocco

Buckner in another study (2007:124-125) lists five factors contributing to the growth of English in Morocco which span a diverse array of economic, educational and social fields. First, Economic incentives

relating to employability of students. Second, globalization and internationalization of culture since English provides access to foreign and specifically Anglophone cultures. Third, tourism which employs skilled English speakers in a range of fields; travel agents, hotels, airlines. Fourth, Higher education academia which relates to students' incentive to pursue their studies abroad, either in the US or the UK. Fifth, the social aspect of English which makes it a tool of socialization among its speakers.

4.4. Present Situation of ELT in Moroccan Higher Education

Concerning the present situation of ELT in Moroccan Higher Education. First, the aims of teaching English have changed from spreading the English language throughout Morocco as it was in the past to newer aims of equipping students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to meet the requirements of the job market. This led to change in content courses which was carried out by de- emphasizing traditional language and literature courses while emphasizing modern language and specializations courses including new courses that have been introduced recently such as training executives, English for diplomacy, English for entrepreneurship and business, etc. Third, teaching methodology has changed, learner centeredness became the vogue. To exemplify, pair work, group work and presentations have been introduced in the English Departments to make up for the shortcomings of the traditional lecturing practice. Last, assessment with its formative –oriented aspect which aims not only at assessing students but also at providing feedback on the process of teaching and learning (Ouakrime, 2003: 460).

To sum up, English Language Teaching in Morocco is incessantly gaining grounds due to the aforementioned reasons. Being the lingua franca of the world, English is increasingly encroaching on the domain of French though the latter has deep historical, cultural, and linguistic roots in Morocco. Inevitably, English in Morocco will supersede tomorrow the status enjoyed by French today.

5. Public and Private Higher Education
5.1. Tentative Definitions of Public and Private Higher Education

Public versus private higher education has always been a contentious issue in almost every country. The center of contention can be attributed to the fuzzy line between the two sectors, profit and non-profit mission, and the quality-profit assumption. Generally, Public higher education is defined as education sponsored mainly by government subsidies, whereas private education is sponsored by individuals or organizations who invest their money for the sake of gain. However, in reality, this is not true because private institutions enjoy some of the public aid like tax exemption and public expenditures on private institutions. Public institutions on the other hand receive support and grants from private organizations. To illustrate this confusion, Douglas and Lombardi (2006) posit that America's private universities are a public trust, which means they are publicly subsidized institutions with private governance.

5.2. A Succinct History of Higher Education

Historically, higher education was private. It was imparted by religious institutions and monastic schools in which monks and nuns used to be the teachers. One of the first universities dates back to the 6th century. They were run and financed by the church because the church had power, money, and status with an aim of spreading its ideology. Later on, in Mediaeval Europe, universities were founded by kings which gave rise to universities such as the University of Bologna (1088) in Italy. The latter was a revolution at that time since it upheld a new philosophy of encouraging autonomy, exchange, freedom, equality among the people, awarding of degrees, and learning for learning sake. It was the first attempt to sever the ties from the church. Bologna University paved the way for Paris (1150), and Oxford (1167) Universities to see light later. In the US, however, going to college was a rare phenomenon, the first college was Harvard, founded in 1636 with the intention of training puritans to serve as ministers in churches, public officials and magistrates. However, there was drastic change in the 19th century, the federal government took charge of establishing state colleges through the Land Act.

5.3. Is Higher Education a Public Good?

Some would argue that higher education is a public, mixed or private good depending on the mode of education offered. In this regard, According to Cemmel (n.d.), higher education is a public good based on two criteria which are: Non- excludability and non-rivalry. To illustrate these concepts, non-exclusion means that higher education should be accessible to all on the basis of merit which goes with the idea of human rights. Non-rivalrous means that one persons' use of the good does not diminish another person's use. However, when access to public higher education is limited in access,

research done in these institutions benefit only a small party or organization, then the notion of public good should be reconsidered.

5.4. Functions of Public Higher Education

Public Higher education fulfils four major functions which are: First, the development of new knowledge, public institutions share the fruits of their labors unlike private ones. Second, the training of highly qualified personnel on the basis of merit; however, this basis becomes mechanism of exclusion of many students (Ibid). Third, the provision of services to society in terms of empowering individual agents and increasing the vibrancy of the economic activity. Last, the ethical function which implies the social criticism which higher education is responsible for reinforcing inequality, "social criticism may be perceived as bad where there is limited input of empowerment" (Ibid).

5.5. Quality Assurance in Private and Public Higher Education

Quality is guaranteed in private **II.** higher education through regulatory bodies. In the UK for example, the independent sector is diverse in terms of mission, ownership, size, subject, specialisms, student profile, fee levels, and level of awards. (Woodfield, 2014: 11). Educational excellence and quality assurance is provided by distinguished bodies such as Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and other professional entities. "The higher education regulatory system protects quality through tight control over the award of 'university title' and degree-awarding powers" (Ibid: 12). These private institutions "undergo a rigorous course designation process covering quality assurance, financial sustainability and management, and governance arrangements" (Ibid).

5.6. Quality- Profit Assumption

The quality-profit assumption which claims that profit reduces quality comes in part from the traditional provision of education as an altruistic activity (Kinser, 2013:12). However, this assumption fails in terms of three main strategies which are: First, reducing costs for delivering an education program. Second, offer programs that are already cheap to teach but priced higher by traditional comprehensive universities cross-subsidizing their own more expensive academic programs. Third, reduce 'frills' elsewhere at the university. (Ibid: 13)

5.7. Private Higher Education in Morocco

In Morocco, two types of private higher education exist. First, private or semi-public, not-for-profit higher education in which Alkhawyn University stands alone. It was created to stimulate competition among other institutions. Its funds come mainly from the university's own activities, state aid, donations, students' fees and research projects. Second, private-for-profit institutions like the International University in Rabat and Casablanca, the Mediterranean University in Fez, business schools such as EGEA, ISIC etc. which are owned either by companies or by individuals.

By and large, though higher education is not a pure public good which means that it is clearly possible to exclude people who do not pay, the benefits of higher education are shared by the participants and the rest of society. However, the bottom line should be the extent to which these institutions be it private or public succeed to meet the needs of the learners and guarantee a quality education where everyone is included and no one is excluded.

6. Brain Drain

The British Royal Society first coined the expression Brain Drain to describe the movement of scientists and technologists from England to the US and Canada in the mid-twentieth century. Generally, Brain Drain refers to the significant migration of educated or talented individuals from their countries of origin to other countries where there are more opportunities and wider horizons waiting for them. Brain Drain in higher education refers to the flow of first rate students, teaching staff, and doctors from an economically poor country to an economically richer one. Although the Brain Drain has been part of academia for a century, the situation is increasingly acute for all sides. For developing and emerging countries which will be left behind in terms of development (Altbach, 2013:1). This flow of human intellects boils down to many factors and by implicature has many positive and negative impacts.

6.1. Factors of Brain Drain

Causes of the flow of talented emigrants can be best illustrated in a push-and-pull model. Besides some personal factors pertaining to personal benefits and interests of the individuals. What can be deduced from this is that all these factors are inextricably linked together.

6.1.1 Pushing Factors

Pushing factors in higher education can be summarized in the flowing points: Lack of research programs in home countries, low quality education that meets the needs of the prospective Brain Drainers. Also, low ranked universities, economic depression,

lack of academic freedom, oppression and political instability like the cases of Algeria and Egypt which witness higher rates of Brain Drain.

In a nutshell, Syed Jafar Askari viewed terrorism and economic crises as the main factors which forced the highly qualified and brilliant people to leave the country" (Cited in Sajjad, 2010: 38)

6.1.2   Pulling Factors

Researchers such as Nadeem, Ashfaq and Rahmatullah observed some pulling factors with regards to Pakistan, among which are : The availability of a propitious environment for research, better salaries for researchers in recipient countries, more diverse fields of specialization, advanced technologies, availability of supporting experienced staff, meritocracy and transparency, rich opportunities for publication, political stability and optimum living conditions for Brain Drainers and their children. (Cited in Sjjad, 2010: 40)

6.1.3 Personal Factors

Other factors which are neither pulling nor pushing, but relate to personal preferences in terms of marriage, the ambition for an improved career and lifestyle, all these can serve as impetus for talented individuals to leave their home countries.

6.2. Impacts of Brain Drain

6.2.1   Positive Impacts

The phenomenon of Brain Drain has numerous positive affecting both emigrants and their countries respectively. These impacts can be described in terms of the following points: First, the enrichment of the home country with specialized knowledge where international students contribute significantly to the economies of Europe, North America, and Australia while they are studying as well as if they remain (Albach, 2013: 4). Second, Professional development of Brain Drainers. Third, the contribution that the new skilled personnel afford when they return to their home countries in terms of new innovative mentality and projects. Last but not least, decreasing the rates of unemployment in the country of origin by saving talented intellectuals from being wasted.

6.2.2 Negative Impacts

The negative impacts that the Brain Drain may have on individuals and countries are numerous. Firstly, the reduction of the already low amount of skills and manpower in the country of origin. Secondly, it reduces the number of dynamic and innovative people who will take the lead in different fields and disciplines. Thirdly, Brain Drain

makes the country dependent on technical assistant and skills of expensive specialists from developed countries. Besides, it widens the already wide gaps between industrialized and non-industrialized countries. Finally, loss of money in form of tax revenues that are paid to the host country instead of home country.

6.3.Solutions to Combat Brain Drain

Concerning Brain Drain solutions, Sajjad (2010:51) based on her study suggests many beneficial ideas for countries that suffer from this plague. These solutions are as follow: Stopping corruption which is already rife in developing countries, return of professionals by offering them posts, reverse Brain Drain programs, national research programs for universities through encouragement and financial support which are given to researchers in all disciplines in order to come back, the transfer of knowledge through expatriate nationals with many objectives concerning the transfer of know how about technologies, equal opportunities provided to talented youths, and justice in laws and rules.

In brief, Brain Drain is a double-edged sword, it is a boon for the host, developed countries which rely heavily in the imported manpower to serve its economic development. Whereas, it is a curse for the under-developed countries which find themselves in acute shortage of skilled and semi-skilled manpower and intellectuals who are supposed to be the catalyst of change as well as and an essential cog in the larger machine of economy. As an implication to this, countries like Morocco should encourage its Brain-Drainers to return back, providing those with the necessary tools and institutional incentives so that their country and their fellow-citizens could benefit from them in hope that Brain Drain will become Brain Gain.

7. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to touch on some major issues related to higher education with special reference to Morocco. First, it provided some definitions, functions and mission of both university and higher education. Second, it sought to give a sketchy historical background of the development of higher education in Morocco along with tackling the issue related to governance in higher education which is cost- sharing. Third, it delved into the major reforms which took place in the Moroccan higher education from independence. Fourth, it tackled the status of ELT in Morocco as well as its current situation in Moroccan higher education in terms of aims, content, methodology, and assessment. It also

attempted to deal with the issue of private versus public higher education. Finally, it tried to address a contentious issue related to higher education in the world which is Brain Drain namely its causes, its impacts as well as some potential solutions to combat it.

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