

**IMPACT OF CHILD LABOUR ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PRE-PRIMARY AND LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN MURANG'A COUNTY, KENYA**

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**Accepted: June 12, 2024**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Understanding the complex interplay between school attendance, academic performance, and child labour is crucial for addressing educational challenges faced by young learners in Murang'a County, Kenya. This study investigates how school attendance and academic performance are influenced by child labour among pre-primary and lower primary school pupils. Employing a descriptive survey design, data was collected from 528 respondents including teachers, pupils, parents, and head teachers across 8 sub-counties using questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews. Analysis of the data revealed significant findings: child labour negatively impacts both school attendance and academic performance, primarily driven by socio-economic factors. Qualitative data highlighted the underlying causes and motivations behind child labour practices, while quantitative analysis provided statistical insights into correlations between variables, supported by Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The study underscores the urgent need for coordinated efforts to combat child labour and its detrimental effects on educational outcomes. Recommendations include targeted interventions to address socio-economic drivers of child labour, enhanced parental involvement in education, and policy measures to ensure uninterrupted early schooling for all children. This research contributes to the formulation of effective strategies aimed at safeguarding children's right to education and promoting their academic participation in Murang'a County, Kenya, and beyond.*

**Key Words:** School Attendance, Children, Academic Performance, Child Labour

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**CITATION:** Maina, C. W., Ezne, E., & Kibathi, D. W. (2024). Impact of child labour on school attendance and academic performance of pre-primary and lower primary school pupils in Murang'a County, Kenya. *Reviewed Journal of Education Practice*, 5 (1), 61 – 72.

## INTRODUCTION

Child labour has been a historical problem in Kenya since the colonial period. Children worked on the white settlers' farms on behalf of their parents to pay the requisite taxes: according to Jomo Kenyatta, the economic life of Kenyans, presented in 1971. The National Household Demographic Surveys for 2016 and 2017 showed that 5.2million children aged 5-7 actively participated in the job market. The study showed that the prevailing situation was influenced by unstable families, HIV/AIDS scourge, economic downturns, and excessive rural-urban immigration.

However, the above study has failed to clarify the extent to which the mentioned factors have negatively influenced early learning education in general and specifically in the current study.

It is prudent to consider Kenya's trajectory in determining its percentage of child labourers that should be in school for the past twelve years. This would enable education facilitators to gauge the government's efforts to combat this problem. According to Wainaina (2011), child labour is quite prevalent in Murang'a County. Child labourers in quarry mines and coffee and tea plantations have been listed in Murang'a first county Integrated plan (2013-2017) as one of the challenges facing access and retention in school. Nonetheless, these types of child labour, as defined by ILO and other researchers, do not indicate how the practice adversely influences the academic participation of learners in their early years of learning, especially in Kenya, more so in Murang'a County; hence, further investigations are needed. It is no longer valid to assume that children either attend school or work as most do both. There is a strong correlation between education and child labour where working children were found to pay their school fees as well as those of their siblings (Bass, 2004). This is based on statistics conducted 20 years ago. Therefore, the researcher intends to determine if current statistics indicate similar conditions as those conducted in earlier years.

Bass (2004) dictates that while work does not prevent a child from attending school, they are more likely to exhibit symptoms of fatigue or exhaustion. It further reduces the time they take to study, limiting their capacity to concentrate and learn properly. On the other hand, another expert argues that the relationship between school attendance, school performance, and work has been generally seen as unfavourable since work interferes with schooling because it requires too much of a child's time (Heady, 2003). UNICEF found out that there exists a correlation as far as traditions, attitude, education, and labour are concerned among some Kenyan communities (UNICEF, 2008). It shows that educating girls is a waste of time and money as they will get married; thus, their education will benefit the husband's family. Consequently, girls are seen spending much more time on domestic tasks than boys; hence poor performance is realized (UNICEF). The girls subjected to family chores feel side-lined, affecting their esteem. Moreover, some are not enrolled in preschool centres, leading to poor academic standards (UNESCO, 2004). A Global survey conducted in 2012 states that child labour arose out of the problems facing people during the Industrial revolution, a period where they would work up to 12 hours daily in dangerous conditions (ILO, 2012). Education is the key tool in preventing child labour, while child labour is an obstacle to children attending school.

Governments should ensure that everyone has free, universal educational opportunities, and kids should n't start working until they reach the legal age. Children's potential to grow into useful members of society is harmed by employment. The student becomes discouraged and drops out as a result of their poor performance. This leads to a trend of an uneducated workforce whose chances to boost their living standards are limited. The outcome is a potential generation perpetuating criminal activities or ignorance as they lack basic education prospects.

However, introduction of free primary school education in 2003 did not negate the country's problem with marginalized populations. One in fifteen girls in Narok County proceeded to secondary school after leaving primary school with university transition rates exhibiting lower numbers (Parsitau, 2017). This erroneous gender consideration leaves many girls with a laborious task to study. While there is a strong

political commitment to provide children with education, access remains lopsided because of varying reasons. The previously mentioned problems are strongly related to the household structure (Parsitau, 2017). A large proportion of children in Kenya work while attending school due to socioeconomic status. Therefore, policy makers should determine if they determine that working hinders one's education attainment and focus on this economic inequality while ascertaining that some traditional cultures consider girls based on economic value, considering education a waste of resources as they determine they will get married someday (Parsitau, 2017).

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are incidences of child labour all over the world. It is commonly practiced in commercial agricultural sectors, tourism, stone mining, fishing, and salt mining industries. Children also work in informal sectors as domestic helpers, street beggars, and hawkers; child prostitution and other forms of child exploitation exist. The plight was presented in Kenya by white pilgrims who owned large crop estates during the colonial period (Mada, 2003). Kenya showcases a poor enrolment of pupils in the early years of learning even with free primary education, high dropout rates, and low retention rates. Children of school-going age are found in towns loitering and selling merchandise at bus stops and along the streets.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of child labour on learners' academic participation in the early years of education in Murang'a County.

Specifically, the study intended to:

- Establish the relationship between child labour and school attendance of pre-primary and lower primary school pupils.
- Establish the relationship between child labour and school retention of pre-primary and lower primary school pupils.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

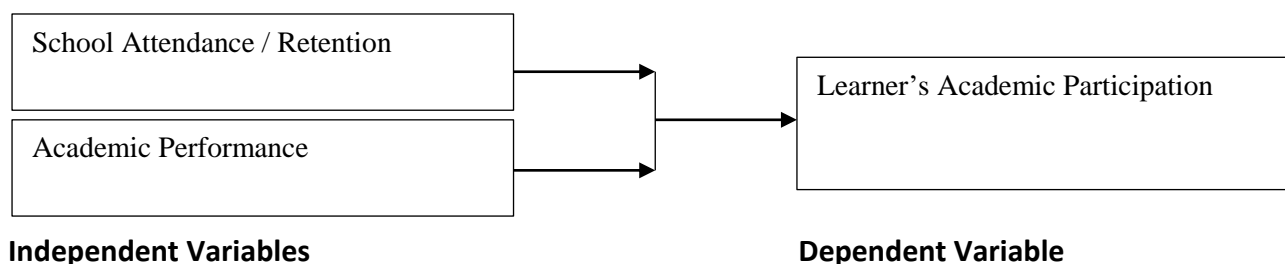
### ***Theoretical Review:***

The ecosystem may not affect the child directly but may still impact their life. A good example is a situation where the father is illiterate; thus, he did not have direct contact with education. He may find it a waste of time and money to have their children enrolled in early years of education or be in school. Other parents may be very harsh to their children who don't perform very well in school as they perceive that they are wasting households' resources.

There is also the microsystem, which may involve the whole society and its cultural pattern and values. Those with negative cultural stereotypes may have boy children enrolled in school while girls work for their parents or, even worse, married off at a very early age. Finally, the chronosystem demonstrates the usefulness dimension of time, which influences change and constancy in the child's environment. The attitude and cultural values of the parents and the entire society may change over time due to government policies and influences leading to total enrolment and attendance of children in school.

Using the ecological model developed by Uriel Bronfenbrenner, public policy, community, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal issues influence the propagation of child labor. A large number of individuals would attest that starting at the family unit builds a structure for children to avoid the problems associated with a lack of education. In this instance, prospects such as free education and scholarships could be enticing to parents while government initiatives that focus on job employment and retention should be put in place to provide a stable home. There is a necessity for government, organizations, and communities to work together to eradicate child labour as the continuous cycle leads future generations to face a similar problem.

## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

### Influence of Child Labour on School Attendance/ Retention

Retention occurs when a child is enrolled in preschool and goes through lower primary until the end of eight years or until they graduate. According to Gale Encyclopaedia of Education (2011), poverty is the primary—if not the primary cause of parents putting their kids to work. As household income and resources rise, the prevalence of child labor declines (Admassie, 2002). According to a distinct school of thinking, researchers should include the policy environment in addition to family poverty (Hiraoka, 1997; Post, 2002; Weiner, 1991). According to Post and Weiner, regional disparities in national laws and policies towards education may be seen in the rates of child labor and school attendance across Latin America and Asia. According to Weiner (1991), the elites' guiding ideologies and the political alliances in favor of increasing school enrolment are what cause regional disparities in child labor and school attendance rates in India. Because of this, it is necessary to examine family choices in light of the social, cultural, and political variables that influence those decisions in order to properly comprehend the link between child labor and learning patterns. Girls work more than boys do on average. According to studies, households led by women often have lower incomes than households headed by men.

According to the Republic of Kenya (2005), Sessional paper No. 1 of 2005, policy initiatives have focused on attaining E.F.A. and, particularly, U.P.E. The key concerns are access, retention, and quality, and relevance, internal and external efficiency within the education system. Therefore, every effort is required to sustain the current enrolment and address the critical issues of improved access, equity, and quality. Some of the government's policies and strategies include implementing free and compulsory primary education (F.C.P.E.), mobilizing parents and communities through creating awareness and infrastructure, and providing additional support to low-cost boarding schools in Arid and semi-Arid Lands (A.S.A.L.s) and taking affirmative action.

### Child Labour and Academic Performance

Child labour is often a complex issue sustained by employers, vested interest, class distinction, and poverty, which has denied children the opportunities to have basic education. Admassie (2003) and Boyle (2002) report a relationship between cultural aspects, access to education, and child labour. They cited that, in London, for instance, the preference, many households have for boys over girls reflects stereotype image. To some cultures in London, girls take on domestic responsibilities while boys attend school on time. Late entry has been assumed to influence low esteem among girls, adversely affecting academic performance. The country's deviation from this trend in recent years posits a way that other nations may use to overcome gender discrimination in education. For instance, 35% more girls are likely to fill college application forms than boys (Tutor house, 2022). Kenya should utilize such a methodology to alleviate low education enrolment and progress for females.

According to Fredrick J Zimmerman, journal (2003) on human resources, there exists racial Prejudice in South Africa. African families are seen sending their children to work for the super-rich who need all kinds of services to maintain possessions. Domestic workers are close to representing 10% of the population in the county putting black girls in great demand for the job opportunity that parents deem an excellent way to earn some income. The education system remains dilapidated based on overcrowded classrooms, poor sanitation and infrastructure, a situation that Amnesty International's Shenilla Mohamed claims require urgent solutions (Amnesty International, 2020). A report by Pamchristic and Margaret Gagamakis (1989) reviews that poor education and schooling that the black population that had been offered during apartheid still prevails. Amnesty International shares this gruesome notion and illustrates that post-apartheid education contains remnants of the system. Therefore, substandard education in South Africa is directly related to colonial occupation and should focus on alleviating black families' poverty to address the potential for children to access education.

UNICEF 2008 found out that there exists gender disparity among some Kenyan communities. It points out that educating girls is a waste of time and money as they will get married; thus, their education will benefit the husband's family. Moreover, girls are seen spending more time on domestic tasks than boys, which may be adversarial, affecting girls' academic performance (UNICEF, 2021). UNESCO posited a report in 2004 that indicated some children are not enrolled in preschool centres leading to poor academic standards in the upper classes. This shows minimal changes to boost education provision in the country based on the 2021 report issued by the UNICEF. The current study examines existing measures used for intervention by countries and how effective they have been in reducing child labour and promoting school enrolment to raise academic performance in Murang'a County and Kenya.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of child labour in the early years of learning on school participation in Murang'a County. This design was used in the research to gather information on the impacts of child labour in the early years of learning. The design was also crucial in summarising, presenting, interpreting, and categorizing the information gathered. The main advantage of the descriptive design is that this research design allowed the researcher to collect relevant data that facilitated developing accurate conclusions on the influence of child labour on children in the early years of learning on school participation in Murang'a County.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

### **Reliability Test**

The reliability of the data collection instrument was ascertained using the test-retest method. The evaluated instruments were administered twice to the same group of the sampled subjects within two weeks between the first and second tests. The feedback of data collected through the questionnaire was classified into various categories for a more straightforward correlation. The data was then given a score between 1 and 2 according to its relevance to the research topic. Spearman rank-order correlation was used to calculate the correlation coefficient to establish the degree of consistency. If a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.7 of the questionnaire was obtained, it indicates sufficient high reliability of the instrument.

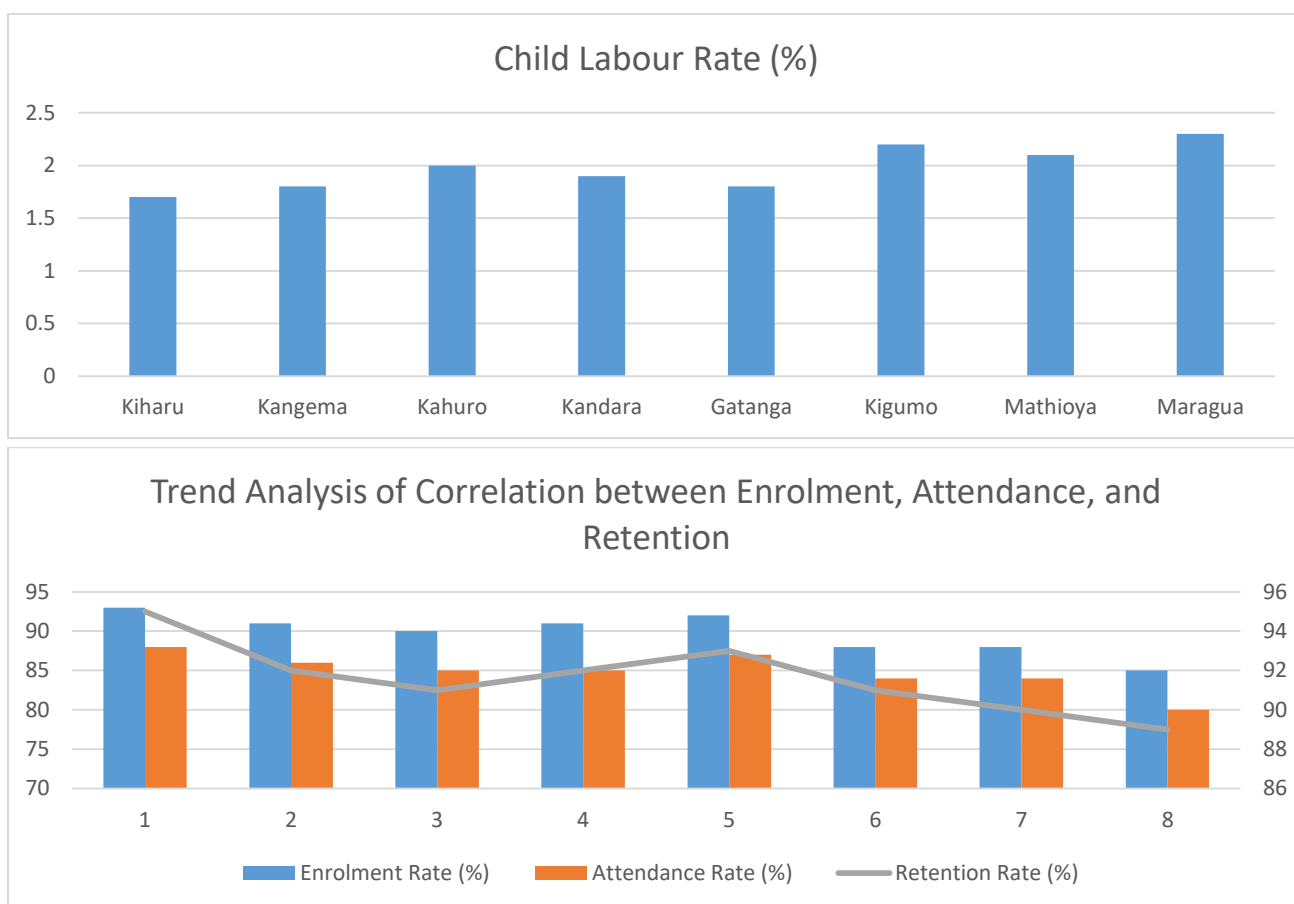
### **Effects of Child Labour**

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and descriptive statistics were used to assess empirical information on the impact of child labor on school participation. The theoretical foundation for this research covers independent factors such as types of child labor and dependent indicators such as attendance, enrollment, and retention rates throughout Murang'a County's eight sub-counties. The scholar believes child labor is favorably connected with student enrollment, attendance, and retention, eventually impacting personal achievement.

**Table 1: Correlation between Child Labour and School Participation**

Sub-County	Child Labour Rate (%)	Enrolment Rate (%)	Attendance Rate (%)	Retention Rate (%)
Kiharu	1.7	93	88	95
Kangema	1.8	91	86	92
Kahuro	2.0	90	85	91
Kandara	1.9	91	85	92
Gatanga	1.8	92	87	93
Kigumo	2.2	88	84	91
Mathioya	2.1	88	84	90
Maragua	2.3	85	80	89

The correlation coefficient study shows a high positive link between child labor and school participation metrics in all sub-counties. The Spearman's rank correlation scores for child labor and enrollment, attendance, and retention rates are 0.70 to 0.75, indicating a substantial relationship between these factors.



**FINDINGS**

Child labor severely affects children's education by reducing school attendance, increasing dropout rates, and lowering academic performance. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society. This discussion highlights key findings on the impact of child labor on education and the need for collaborative interventions to mitigate these effects.

## **Influence of Child Labour on School Attendance/ Retention**

Retention occurs when a child is enrolled in preschool and goes through lower primary until the end of eight years or until they graduate. According to Gale Encyclopaedia of Education (2011), poverty is the primary—if not the primary cause of parents putting their kids to work. As household income and resources rise, the prevalence of child labor declines (Admassie, 2002). According to a distinct school of thinking, researchers should include the policy environment in addition to family poverty (Hiraoka, 1997; Post, 2002; Weiner, 1991). According to Post and Weiner, regional disparities in national laws and policies towards education may be seen in the rates of child labor and school attendance across Latin America and Asia. According to Weiner (1991), the elites' guiding ideologies and the political alliances in favor of increasing school enrolment are what cause regional disparities in child labor and school attendance rates in India. Because of this, it is necessary to examine family choices in light of the social, cultural, and political variables that influence those decisions in order to properly comprehend the link between child labor and learning patterns. Girls work more than boys do on average. According to studies, households led by women often have lower incomes than households headed by men.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Educational efforts play an important role in ending the perpetuation of child labor by giving children the information, skills, and opportunities they require to seek other pathways to success. Legislators may promote inclusive learning environments that prioritize every child's well-being and growth by boosting access to excellent education, strengthening school facilities, and adjusting curriculum to suit the demands of different learners (Fuseini & Daniel, 2020). Furthermore, focusing on professional development and informal learning environments might give alternate avenues for children incapable of attending regular schools owing to jobs or other constraints. Parties in Murang'a County may establish a fairer and more equitable future for youngsters by adopting a holistic strategy to combat the root causes of child labor while also boosting academic possibilities.

Child labor presents serious problems, but they are not unsolvable. With political will, collaborative effort, and continuous funding for child protection and learning, genuine progress may be made toward achieving every child's basic rights and objectives. Prioritizing children's safety, empowerment, and learning allows governments, educators, and communities to collaborate to build a more promising and optimistic future for younger generations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to the study's results, many recommendations are made to alleviate the issues created by child labour and increase pupil engagement in Murang'a County:

### **Encouraging Social Awareness and Transformation**

Raising social awareness and change is essential for addressing the core causes of child labour and creating an atmosphere that upholds children's liberties and wellness. This entails increasing awareness about the detrimental effects of child labour on children's welfare, growth, and future chances, as well as addressing damaging cultural practices and beliefs that encourage exploitative behavior (Schwikowski, 2021). Authorities, civil society groups, and media outlets all play important roles in campaigning for the rights of children, organizing communities, and promoting debate about the value of education and child safety. Furthermore, education and awareness initiatives should target caregivers, employers, and local officials to encourage good parenting customs, alternative ways to earn money, and grassroots approaches to the root causes of child labour (Akabayashi & Psacharopoulos, 1999). By raising social awareness and encouraging change, stakeholders may create a supportive atmosphere that emphasizes children's rights, wellness, and academic opportunities.

### **Educational Adaptations**

Educational changes are critical for effectively addressing the problem of child labour. It is critical to emphasize improving access to excellent education, especially for underprivileged and vulnerable children who are in danger of engaging in predatory labour practices. This includes creating new schools and enhancing school infrastructure to ensure secure and conducive educational settings. Furthermore, educational



changes must concentrate on making the curriculum more relevant to the demands of different learners, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds. This might entail merging lessons in life skills, vocational training, and entrepreneurial initiatives to provide youngsters with the required skills and information for future success. Flexible learning alternatives, such as non-formal education programs and distant learning initiatives, can give alternate routes for students who cannot attend regular schools owing to job or other educational impediments (Ndung'u, 2017). Governments may adopt extensive educational reforms to develop equitable and inclusive educational systems that allow all students to reach their full potential and prevent the downward spiral of exploitation and destitution.

**Capacity Building and Support Services:** Efforts to enhance the capacity of educators, social workers, and other participants are critical for strengthening child protection systems and providing support services to disadvantaged children and their families (Schwikowski, 2021). Training sessions should include developing knowledge about child rights and security concerns, recognizing and reacting to symptoms of child labor and abuse, and applying successful preventative measures. Furthermore, capacity-building activities should expand beyond formal schooling settings to include community-based groups, government departments, and local governments that work in child safety and welfare (Schwikowski, 2021). Authorities may enhance the detection, reporting, and response procedures for child labour situations by strengthening the competence of primary caregivers and vendors of services and ensuring those impacted receive the appropriate support and services. Furthermore, offering counseling, social assistance, and guidance services might lessen child labor's adverse effects on children's wellness and aid in their readmission into society and schooling. Participants may boost children's safe environments and resistance to abuse and neglect by providing tailored capacity-building and support services.

### **Areas For Further Research**

Assessing the impact of existing policies and interventions aimed at reducing child labor and improving school enrolment and retention is critical. Evaluative studies on programs such as cash transfers, school feeding programs, and community education initiatives can provide evidence on what works and what doesn't. This knowledge is essential for refining and scaling successful interventions.

Exploring the potential of technology and innovative educational practices in mitigating the effects of child labor is a promising area for research. Flexible learning schedules, digital classrooms, and mobile learning units could offer alternative educational opportunities for working children. Investigating these innovations can help integrate marginalized children into the educational system.

Investigating alternative livelihood programs for families that rely on child labor can offer sustainable solutions. Identifying viable economic opportunities for parents can reduce the necessity for children to work, thereby enabling them to attend school regularly. Research in this area can inform the development of economic policies and programs that support family income without compromising children's education.

Conducting comparative studies between Murang'a County and other regions in Kenya or similar contexts globally can provide valuable insights. Such comparisons can reveal best practices and innovative solutions that could be adapted to local circumstances, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing child labor.

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