

Reasons for Demand and Dropping out of Vocational High Schools from the Perspective of School Administrations

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Abstract

The goal this study is to define the reasons for demand of and drop-outs from vocational high schools in the perspective of school administrations serving at the vocational high schools. The study employs the phenomenologic pattern, which is a method of qualitative research. The pool of the study consists of six school administrations working at vocational high schools. Data were collected by means of personal interviews and analyzed by method of descriptive analysis. According to the results of the study, a demand for vocational high school is defined by obligation or an expectation of acquiring a profession in a short period of time. Academic failure, discontinuation and economic reasons play a role in school drop outs. Keeping the matter on the agenda by school administrations and teachers will be an important step in making more obvious this side of vocational high schools that deepens the educational inequalities in terms of education demand and school drop-outs.

Keywords: Education demand, school drop-out, vocational high school, school administration

1. Introduction

It is possible to talk about two sources of the education demand. One of them is the individual education demand and the other is the demand for manpower (Tural, 1994). The social demand (request) approach in education is shaped by the expectations, demands and requirements of individuals with from the education. The education demand is defined as the possibility for an individual to attend to a certain educational institution at a certain level in a certain subject (Serin, 1979). The education demand emerges on two planes, which are the individual and social planes. Despite being used both on social and individual levels, the social demand is a total of individual education demand and can be estimated by taking advantage of the variables that affect it. For instance, the demand for obligatory education is nearly equal to the population of the age for obligatory education and it is possible to make predictions based on this fact (Unal, 1996; Karakutuk, 2012). Individual education demand is defined by decisions of individuals to attend to certain education stages. These decisions are the choices such as the contents of a program, location of a school and the school being private or public. Expectations, demands are not sufficient by themselves for determination of the school and program choice/decision of individuals. Rules and qualifying systems placed for applications to respective programs play a limiting role in this matter (Tural, 1994).

The demand for manpower in education rests on the assumption that it constitutes the manpower properties produced during the education process is the bond between social development and education rather than individual expectations and requirements. Therefore, it approaches the education in terms of educating the manpower in quantities and with qualities as required by the economy. The education demand of production systems expresses the provision of opportunities for teaching the students the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the job during education periods of various types and levels. This approach covers the professional secondary education and higher education planning (Tural, 1994; Unal, 1996; Karakutuk, 2012). This function assigned to the education by the manpower approach draws a narrow border to the education (and the ones taking advantage of professional education) and defines the direction of regulations related to education on the other hand. For instance, professional education was seen as one of the headstones of the development and the professional education began to be built

separately from the general education with the purpose of raising “intermediary manpower” needed by the economy.

The variables that affect the education demand can be classified as *personal*, *economic*, *socio-cultural* and *institutional* (Unal, 1996). *Personal variables* cover the age, biological characteristics, cognitive skills, interests, future expectations. *Economic variables* include education costs, income level, income expectations, choice of profession, market expectations. Family roots and social gender are among the *Socio-Cultural variables*. Whereas, *Institutional variables* cover such matters as education system, operation of the structure of education systems, education policies. The choice of profession, which is one of the economic variables of the education demand, can be associated with the education related expectations of individuals especially after the obligatory education. The bond between choice of an educational institution and the choice of profession generally constitute one of the most important reasons for social education preferences. Individuals make their choices of profession within the scope of the benefit-cost analysis and the expectation from the profession mostly covers economic benefits. Despite the certain differentiations, the fact that education leads to an individual’s professional status and differences in allowance is a commonly accepted point of view by individuals and economists alike.

In general, evaluations regarding the educational system and especially the vocational education would surely exhibit differences according to the historical periods, levels of development of countries, social formation, supply demand equilibrium. When the matter is approached from this point of view the change of demand in technical education will become more comprehensible. For instance, the goal to raise “manpower” required by the economy with the goal for vocational technical education to have a greater rate of schooling than general education since 1960 (general secondary education 35%, vocational technical secondary education 65%) has survived since the planned reconstruction period and has taken a place as basic goal in reconstruction plans. Here, the fact that vocational and technical education addressed the characteristics sought by individuals to be employed within the industry by means of public financing seemed like a rather rational policy during the period with strong recovery paradigm and with social welfare state characteristics being observed in the employment process (Aksoy, 2013, 64). These days, when the understanding of social state has almost disappeared and national development plans are put on ice, the vocational technical education is being shaped for raising of the "manpower" needed by the market.

Shaping of the vocational education according to the market caused the governments to organize the vocational education as required by the market. In this regard, changes were made to the contents and structure of the education. Common high schools being converted into Anadolu High Schools¹ is the most important of said organizations in understanding that vocational education is preferred in Turkey in terms of the education demand. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) executed the project "for converting common high schools into Anadolu High Schools with the aim to direct more students into vocational and technical education" by publishing a memorandum in 2010. In this regard, pupils, who could not enroll in academic high schools that accept students by examinations, in other words - unsuccessful students in terms of academic achievements, could be provided with education in either vocational or open high schools. Additionally, the 8-year obligatory education in Turkey was increased to 12 years (4 years of elementary, 4 years of secondary, and 4 years of high school) by the education law enforced on 30 March 2012.² Students that were not placed into any academic high school within the obligatory education are being directed to a vocational or an open high school on mandatory basis.

¹ Common and Anadolu High Schools are academic high schools. The difference between them is that common high schools directly register students graduated from elementary schools and Anadolu High Schools require the students to receive a certain point from the uniform exam in order to be able to enroll. Common high schools were removed since 2010, students that were not successful in the uniform exam were prevented from studying in academic high schools.

² Despite the fact that increasing the obligatory education to 12 years seems positive, the adopted law provides an opportunity for 4-year elementary school graduates or 4-year secondary school graduates to complete their education distantly. Therefore, many students prefer to graduate by means of remote education.

It has been mentioned above that education demand is defined by certain decisions of individuals. The continuation, maintenance of education stage can be evaluated within the education demand as much as a decision to enroll in a certain education stage. That is, the education demand continues as far as individuals continue in their education. Elementary graduates heading towards vocational schools due to lack of choices explains the cause for low schooling rate in secondary education, as well as the cause for school drop-outs in secondary education. For instance, while the average value of graduations from secondary education (common and vocational) in 2011 in OECD states is 83% and in European Union states 84%, in Turkey the average value is 56%. This rate is the second lowest rate after Mexico (49%) among the OECD states (OECD, 2013, 53). In other words, Turkey is the second state yielding graduates on the lowest level in secondary education and is significantly below the rates of graduation from secondary education in OECD and EU averages. According to the MoNE, the secondary education schooling rate in Turkey according to the 2011-2012 data is 70.6% (Ozoglu et al. 2013). Therewith, the highest number of school drop-outs within all education stages in Turkey is observed in the secondary education and in vocational high schools of secondary education (ERG, 2010; ERG 2012; Ozoglu et al. 2013).

As is known, the school drop-out term is defined as a student's discontinuation of their education program without graduating (Suh, 2001; Dekkers&Claassen, 2001). The variables that lead to school drop outs are classified as *personal, economic, socio-cultural and institutional*. The expectations, interests of students from programs they are enrolled in are among the *personal variables*. According to Rumberger (2001), personal variables are related to the students' attitude, behavior and values. Academic relations such as learning and social relations such as being a member of the school engagements are effective in the students' decisions to drop out from school. *Economic variables* are related with the incomes of student families. A low income level in a family (Cairns et al. 1989; Alexander et al. 2001; Suh et al. 2007) increases the risk of school drop out. The family, family origins, social circle, gender mainstreaming are among the *socio-cultural variables*. Substance abuse in the family, exploitation in the family, excessive family problems create factors for dropping out from school (Cairns et al., 1989; Suh et al., 2007; Sumet al., 2003). Teacher-school relations, academic failure are accepted as variables that affect the school drop in terms of institutional variables. There are studies that report a strong relation between the school drop outs and academic failure (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Suh et al., 2007). Studies carried out in Turkey show that these variables affect the school dropouts (Gökşen et al., 2006; Simsek 2011; Bulbul 2013; Ozdemir et al. 2010; Tas et al. 2013; Ozoglu et al. 2013).

Despite the presence of studies on the matter of demand in vocational high schools in Turkish literature (Cakar, 2000; Gurol, 2002; Tek, 2006; Yolcu, 2011) there are very little studies regarding the school dropouts (Gökşen et al., 2006; Simsek 2011; Bulbul 2013; Ozdemir et al. 2010; Tas et al. 2013; Ozoglu et al. 2013). Together with lack of studies that research the reasons of demand and dropouts in vocational high schools, there is a lack of studies that research the matter from the perspective of school administrations. The study is therefore different from other studies, and it is expected that this study will respond to the lack of respective literature. Based on this, the goal is to define the reasons for demand and dropouts in vocational high schools on the basis of the views of school administration employed in vocational high schools.

2. Method

The study pattern

One of the qualitative research methods, the phenomenological pattern was used in this study. Yildirim & Simsek (2011) define the phenomenological studies as studies focusing on acknowledged occurrences, which give no deep and detailed understanding. In this regard, the focus of this study is formed by reasons of demand and dropouts in vocational high schools.

Population

The of the study is comprised of six school administrations serving at vocational high schools in the Karadeniz Ereğli region. There are three vocational high schools (excluding imam hatip high schools) in the said region. Two volunteer school administrations were taken from each school. When determining the population of the study, the criterion sampling technique of the purposeful sampling methods was taken for basis. When forming the sample group, the fact of "being a school administration. In vocational high schools" was taken as a criterion for the study participants. 4 of the participants are male and 2 are female and their professional experiences vary between 19 and 28 years. while 3 of the participants are school principals, 3 of them are vice-principals.

Data collection

The study data were collected by means of a semi-structured interview form. When creating the semi-structured interview form, firstly the related literature was scanned and concepts regarding the education demand and school drop outs were attempted to be defined. Determined concepts were correlated with the goal of the study and the interview form draft was created. The created draft form was discussed with academic members leading studies in the field of education sciences and the final form was obtained. Interviews during the study were performed personally by the researchers. The study was carried out on the basis of willingness of the school administrations. Due to the fact that 2 school administrations refused to have their interviews recorded on a tape, their records were kept in a written form. Interviews of the other four school administrations were recorded on voice recording devices.

Data analysis

The descriptive analysis technique was used in analyzing the study data. As is known, the descriptive analysis is based on definition of the situation by direct quotes from the answers of individuals without touching the free form of the data (Kumbetoglu, 2005). When analyzing the data, the interviews were first transferred into a text form. The compiled text was read by researchers several times and the coding method was employed. The next step following coding was to place the views of school administrations into main and subordinate themes. Coding was also used for the study participants. In this regard, school administrations were defined by a "Y" sound and the order number of the interview. For example "A1", "A2". When school administrations were quoted within the text, these codes were used.

Validity and reliability discussions include various dimensions in the qualitative studies. While validity is a matter that needs to be checked during the presentation and analysis of the data in qualitative research, reliability is related with paying attention to expressions such as "suitability" (compliance with the management goal), "discussion" (discussion of the research data, cumulative interpretation of the data) (Kumbetoglu, 2005). Based on this, certain ways were followed for the validity and reliability of the study. In order to increase the validity of the study, firstly the presence of errors was inspected when transferring the voice records to text. Help of a professional was acquired for the said procedure and absence of errors was confirmed. And for the reliability of the study, the data were conveyed as is and interpreted jointly with other data when necessary. Additionally, an inter-coder reliability analysis was carried out for themes and sub-themes acquired from the study. The Miles & Huberman (1994) reliability formula was used for this procedure and the reliability ratio between the coders was calculated to be 83%.

3. Findings

The findings acquired from the study were presented under four main themes, which are the "*reasons for demanding the vocational high school*", "*problems experienced by students*", "*reasons for students dropping out from school*" and "*measures directed on preventing the problems*".

Reasons for demanding the vocational high schools

School administrations participating in the study were asked about the reasons for students' demand of the vocational high schools. All of the administration explain the reason for choosing the school as the obligation/necessity. For instance, one of the school administrations (A3) explain the situation as follows:

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"After students are placed into schools that accept students through examination, all of the remaining students go to the vocational high schools. This is the most important cause, there is no other condition. Especially the Anadolu High Schools, all of the students are taken through examination, and the ones who pass are enrolled, the others are sent here. Actually, I would say that there is nothing optional here. Our students are in the vocational high school because of the necessity".

On the other hand, another school administration (A1), while also seeing the cause for demand of vocational high schools as "obligation", explains it as students' "the expectation to acquire a profession through a shorter way". A1, expresses their thoughts as follows: *"In my opinion, these vocational schools are groups of students with no clear goal, aim in general, who come because of obligation, probably from broken families... ones who are forced to work in order to hold on to life again, economic reasons, family reasons. Children probably want to go into the life through a shortcut with the goal to stand on their own feet... one of the basic causes, in my opinion, is the fact that they wish to go into grown-up life through a short way without having a goal, aim, purpose clearly defined, so they make their preference for vocational schools"*. According to the A5 school administration, the reason for preference of vocational high schools is the will to "acquire a profession". A5 expressed their thoughts saying: *"The elementary education basic knowledge of children is weak, their levels are low. Low level leads to failure in job acquisition, provision of employment. And failure brings more failure. Therefore, the goals of students, who come to our schools, are to acquire a profession as soon as possible. Do they acquire a profession? That is a completely different question. In words, they are brought up as intermediary personnel, but this does not mean that we have carried out our mission. If they go to an open high school, they will not be able to learn a profession, and will not be able to enroll in a university later on. They come to us preferring to at least learn a profession here"*. A5 explains here that the state, against the appearance of having made an important step by increasing the term of obligatory education to 12 years, in actuality left the students with no options.

Problems experienced by students

The school administrations participating in the study were asked about the problems encountered by students forced to choose the vocational high schools during their education. However, the responses indicated that problems encountered by students were more related to extrascholastic (social) factors rather than in-school problems. Several school administrations participating in the study (A1, A4, A6) emphasize that students are in a "need of attention/love". School administration A4 puts this view into words as follows: *"Having separated parents, they of course require more attention and compassion. And this in turn seriously affects their education in a negative manner. This requires more special attention, more time spent with them and submerging into their world. They probably need to find here the things they cannot find at home and this really wears the teachers out. However, as a teacher, the joy of having given these to the society makes us forget all the troubles. It really makes us forget everything when it is done"*. Another school administration (A3) relates the problems encountered by students to family and socio-economic factors. *"Families have certain problems. There are so much things that we see, the parents are separated and the child lives only with one of them. Or the parents live together but are better off living separately because there are always arguments, father beats the mother and the mother continuously runs away from home. Or the child is at the age of 18 and their mother works at night clubs and their psychologies are damaged. we encounter many similar problems. Therefore, after all, the socio-cultural opportunities, possibilities of such children are clearly different from those of other students due to their social circle. And therefore, students look at the in-school behaviors and cannot define a clear purpose for themselves."*

Another school administration (A4) explains the situation as follows: *"An in general lines ... The children of families with at least 3 children and families that are below the Turkey's average ... Therefore the child does not receive the attention needed due to economic load. We do have such structure. However, there are children, who become very happy with the very little attention and can open into very different results"*

with a little love. The lack of love. When I tell them all these, how we get angry with them for such things, we tell them that they are very important to us, that we love them, they give very different emotional responses. I realized that all of them tipped their heads down... I observe with joy how a very small word grows and becomes valued as it is shared. Frankly, you become very happy in an environment, where the expression of love has a great meaning for them."

On the other hand, another school administration (A2) says, *"We experience problems with bad habits, especially with all kinds of drugs from the society, such as glue-sniffing. The society is very dangerous, for example there could be drugs sold on the ladders between us and the school, the parents have little attention to this, of course the security department and police are acknowledged and measures are being taken"*, thus drawing the attention to drug addiction habits especially becoming popular during the past years among the students of secondary schools.

For another school administration (A6) the issue is as follows: *"Our greatest issue is the academic failure. The academic level is low. Mathematical processes are weak. Students in such situation have difficulties following the curricula"*. School administration A5, sees student absenteeism as another problem, expressing it as *"Another problem comes to the school in the form of discontinuity"*.

Reasons for dropping out from the vocational high schools

The school administrations were asked about the reasons for school drop outs. School administrations have brought various causes to words in regard to this matter. School administration A1 explains the reason for dropping out from school as "beginning to work", that is, in terms of economic factors. According to A1: *"However, in my opinion, one of the basic reasons is that because they have no clear definition of their goals, aims and purposes, they prefer these schools in order to acquire a profession through a short way, and when they cannot find here what they hoped for, they drop out from school and attempt to find their ways in their lives"*. In a similar manner, another school administration A6 draws attention to academic failure and emphasizes the economic reason: *"As I said, the academic failure is the biggest problem, and when the low socio-economic level is added to that, children begin to think that they are being a burden to their families and most of them drop out from school and begin to work in order to get rid of that burden. What kind of academic success could you expect from a child when the conditions are as such. Naturally, it is impossible. The child finds a solution in dropping out from school."*

Academic failure and discontinuation of learning are among the causes for dropping out of school. School administration A3 perceives the academic failure as a reason for school drop outs and says, *"It is not important how much you are skilled in terms of the profession, if a child is to study at the vocational high school, they need to exhibit academic success. The child is unsuccessful, cannot achieve success, some students have perception deficit due to the reasons we have discussed previously (A3)"*.

School administrations A2 and A4 explain the school drop outs by discontinuity, saying, *"As the family's lack of control is added on top of all, despite our numerous attempts to stop them, they are forced to drop out from school due to discontinuity (A4)"*. A2 expresses following thoughts on the matter:

"Most of them come by force. If there was not this obligatory education, and I am speaking for those who dropped out, these students would not have continued with their education if there was not the 12-year obligation. The majority would go into the apprentice education and would learn a profession. A portion of these students are the inclusion students (special education students) and they would also not continue with their education. If there was no obligatory education, that is the 12-year obligation, 90% of the current dropouts would have left school if there was no obligation... Obligatory education, but there is no obligatory education as it was in the past. Since the transition from 8-year education to 12-year obligatory education, it seized being an obligatory education, whoever wants to, leaves the school, there is no obligatory education left. My students dropped out at the age

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of 16, currently has a registration in the system of open high school and even if the registration is not renewed from now on, the record will stay as the student is studying in the open high school. There is no follow-up, the Ministry of National Education does not even ask us whether the students are attending the lessons or not. Last year we had a student, he registered here and then they moved to another place, where they did not register in another school because they had a registration here and the student appeared to be studying here in the e-school system, for two years now the student is absent and nobody even asks where this student at the age of obligatory education is".

Activities directed to prevention of problems

The school administrations were asked about the measures taken to prevent the drop outs and the problems encountered by students at school. All of the school administrations indicated that they meet with the students' parents and encourage the other teachers to meet with the parents in order to prevent the problems. Expressions of school administrations on this matter are as follows:

"We especially meet with the families and students that have low attendance rates. We discuss the education process with the families. There is a 70-80% rate of success in families with higher attention to their children. However, we have no broken family. Most of them are children who experience failure and drop out from school. The largest damage of a breaking family is that it leads to decrease in school performance. Actually, the students are not the ones with problems, it is their families (A6)".

"We cannot do anything after they have dropped out from school. And there could be nothing else to do before that other than requesting the family to warn their child. They do as they will and we warn them because it is our duty (A5)".

4. Discussion

The findings obtained from the study show that all of the school administrations share the point of view that vocational high schools are not chosen but are enrolled in due to the obligation. The fact that the right of education given as a "right" in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is limited by such obligation/necessity needs to be discussed. While the fact that students are registered in different types of schools according to the points received from central exams with no possibility of objective measurement deserves to be discussed in terms of the right for education by itself, the matter is made even more controversial by such obligation. Because nobody is born with a predefined learning potential or instinct; the will/need to be (or not to be) educated is acquired later in life, except for a small portion of genetic knowledge, all the knowledge and the format of knowing in people is learned after the birth (Ozsoy, 2004, 60). Therefore, this emerging reality indicates on the slippery ground under the institutional variables that define the education demand.

Another reality indicated by the school administrations in regard to the reasons of demand in vocational high schools is the expectation of students to "acquire a profession in a short way". Studies performed in regard to the demand of vocational high schools in Turkey (Cakar, 2000; Gurol, 2002; Tek, 2006; Yolcu, 2011) indicate that students prefer vocational high schools for the reasons of faster acquisition of a profession.

As is known, in a capitalist society, education plays a role of maintaining/newly producing class inequalities. In theory, the meritocratic understanding rests on the assumption that social equality will be ensured by means of opportunity equality in education for individuals coming from all fractions of the society, regardless of the social class. However, the social class, in which individuals are located, is one of the most important factors to determine their future professions. Studies carried out in relation to the matter (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giddens, 1993) indicate that factors such as social class, gender, ethnic

origin, household income, profession status have a cumulatively defining effect on the choice of school (and therefore the future choice of profession). For instance, in a study where he examined the choice of schools in France, van Zanten (2000) indicates that while in average the most successful students follow the longest and most respected choices, the choices in vocational education are on contrary deemed appropriate for academically weak students. It is possible to talk about the same result in Turkey. A research conducted by MoNE indicates that 65.4% of children from families with higher education are enrolled in science high schools³ and only the 4% portion is enrolled in vocational high schools (Ozoglu et al. 2013, 36). The expectation of acquiring a profession when choosing a school can be explained by the expectation of income in the future. The choices of school for individuals graduating from elementary schools are generally their profession choices. Thus, the expectations of individuals regarding the rate of income and profit turn into their expectations from the professions (Unal, 1996). When the result obtained from the study is approached from this point of view, students coming from lower classes are aware that they will not be able to continue with higher education and therefore choose a vocational high school, where they would be able to acquire income.

Student problems constitute another result obtained from the study. The interviewed school administrations listed the problems as being in need of attention/love, family indifference, substance abuse, academic failure and discontinuity. In other words, the listed problems are social (being in need of attention/love, family indifference, substance abuse) and academic (academic failure, discontinuity) problems. These problems experienced in secondary schools are similar to the results of other studies (Karatay & Kubilay, 2004; Sarpkaya 2007; Turnuklu 2007) School administrations indicated that they have not developed any solutions against the problems experienced by students other than warning the parents regarding the academic problems of the student and meeting with the parents in general. This finding of the study shows that the social problems could not be solved through the school and that social problems are directly reflected on the school. Such social problems reflecting on the school could be resolved by adopting measures on governmental level.

On the other hand, when these problems, whether social or academic, listed by school administrations are handled in terms of school drop out, each of them creates a risk factor for the school drop out. Studies indicating that said issues create a risk for school drop out are available (Rumberger, 2001; Suh et al. 2007; Sum et al., 2003; Ozer et al. 2011). School drop out is explained with individual, institutional, economic and social causes. The study gave a result that the school drop out is caused by institutional and economic factors. School administrations indicated academic failure and school discontinuity as the institutional variables in school drop outs. This outcome obtained from this study gives the same result with the outcomes of other studies (Rumberger, 1995; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Suh et al., 2007; Tas et al. 2013). The relation between academic failure and school drop outs is related to the household income level and it is accepted that income has an important effect on school drop out (Ekstrom vd., 1986; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; McNeal, 1999; Pong & Ju, 2000, Rumberger, 2001). Such approach also explains the fact that school drop outs are observed due to economic causes. As a matter of fact, the interviewed school administrations indicated that school drop outs were caused by economic reasons. Studies indicating that school drop outs are caused by economic reasons are available (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; McNeal, 1999; Pong & Ju, 2000, Tas et al. 2013). In other words, generally the vocational high school students coming from a lower socio-economic level drop out from school in order not to be a burden for their families.

5. Conclusion

The choice of students towards vocational high schools in Turkey is determined by the hope to acquire a profession in a shorter time and due to the obligation rather than due to an individual demand. Restraining

³ Higher level academic high school.

the students within such obligation leads to inequalities against students coming from poor sections of the population in terms of the right of education. The same inequality continues throughout the education period and the students drop out from such schools due to economic and academic failure. In order for the structure of vocational high schools that deepens educational inequalities to become obvious, schooladministrationsandteachersshouldkeep the issue on the agenda and thus create the awareness of the problem.

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