

Assessing the effect of family income levels on pupils' dropout rates in UPE schools of Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District, Uganda.

A cross-sectional study.

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Page | 1

Abstract

Background

The study aims to assess the effect of family income levels on pupils' dropout rates in UPE schools.

Methodology

A cross-sectional descriptive study with both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Raw data were cleaned, sorted and entered using a statistical data entry form designed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

Results

The majority of the respondents (91.3%) agreed that most pupils drop out of school to look for income-generating activities so as to assist their parents in raising income for the family (Mean 4.41; Standard deviation 0.895). All respondents (100%) agreed that most pupils drop out of school because their parents have low income, such that they are unable to afford basic needs, particularly food and clothes (Mean=4.51; Standard deviation=0.904). All respondents (100%) agreed that most students drop out of school to assist in taking care of their young siblings so that the parent/guardian can go and work (Mean 4.10; Standard deviation 0.846). Findings show that the majority of the respondents (89.9%) agreed that with the introduction of UPE, the financial status of households does not influence access and retention of pupils in public schools (Mean 4.39; Standard deviation 0.792). There is a significant relationship between socio-economic factors and pupil dropout in terms of family income levels ($r=.393$, $p<0.01$).

Conclusion

Poverty explains the huge numbers of students who leave school to look for work in the district. Owing to poor economic status, parents face challenges in paying the extra levies that are not catered for by UPE.

Recommendations

Government and other stakeholders in the education sector should seek to increase the funding for UPE to cater for all the schools' monetary requirements in order to cushion pupils from poor economic backgrounds from dropping out of school.

Keywords: Family income levels, Pupils' dropout rates, UPE schools.

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Background

School education was introduced in Uganda by the White missionaries, mainly for the children of chiefs and to provide for the functionaries needed by the British colonial government. So, right from the onset, this school system was not for all, and it therefore grew to become highly selective and competitive, with fewer and fewer students continuing to the next level of education. In 1987, the NRM government instituted the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) under the Chairpersonship of Professor Senteza Kajubi to look at the state of the education in Uganda with terms of reference to recommend policies at all educational levels. After consulting with stakeholders, it was recommended that primary education be universalised.

In defence of its recommendations, the commission emphasised that unless every child is enrolled at the right age and does not drop out before completion, it will be impossible to ensure that all citizens have the necessary basic education for living a full life (Kakuru, 2003).

The launch of UPE had been postponed until May 1996 during the first direct presidential elections, where President Museveni made it a campaign platform issue in his manifesto and promised free primary education to four children per family if he was elected. On being elected President in December 1996, he fulfilled his pledge and announced that UPE implementation was to begin in January 1997. After the introduction of UPE, Government

schools experienced a rapid increase in enrolments from 2.8 million in 1997 to 7.6 million in 2004 (MoES, 2005). This increase was not proportionately accompanied by an increase in other educational facilities like infrastructure and teachers, which, to some extent, contribute to school dropout (Deigninger, 2003). The systems theory developed by Bertalanffy in 1968 states that a system is a set of interrelated elements where each element has an effect on the functioning of the whole, and each is affected by at least one other element in the system. Dropout refers to pupils who have abandoned a school course of study. Hyde (1995) asserts that dropouts are children leaving school and not re-enrolled in that or any other school before they have completed a cycle. The aim of the study is to assess the effect of family income levels on pupils' dropout rates in UPE schools in the study area

Methodology

Research Design

The study used a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches to overcome the limitations of using a single design.

Study population

The study population comprised teachers, head teachers, officials in the education department of Buikwe District and parents who were members of the school management committee and PTA. The respondents were chosen because they had so much to tell the researcher as per the study objective. The study was conducted among selected schools of Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District. For purposes of this study, a total of 8 UPE schools were used. The study

used PTA and school management members to represent parents in the schools visited. This population was chosen because of had adequate data concerning the factors explaining school dropout in the study area.

Sample size and sample selection

Sample size

The sample size used was 96 respondents from the target population. The sample size was determined using the formula forwarded by Yamane (1967).

N

$$n = \frac{1}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

Number of target population that conforms to the characteristics of the sample required, E: Margin of error (5%). n: sample size Given the population of 116 respondents, Sn 116/1+116

$(0.05)^2$

Sn =96

From the above, the researcher used a sample size of 144 respondents.

Respondents' category	Target population	Sample size	Sampling technique
Head teachers	8	8	Purposive
Chairmen SMC	8	8	Purposive
District Education Department	4	4	Purposive
Teachers	96	76	Simple random
Total	116	96	

Source: Primary data, 2025

Sampling technique

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Probability sampling is one in which every unit in the population has a chance (greater than zero)

of being selected in the sample, and this probability can be accurately determined. The combination of these traits made it possible to produce unbiased estimates of population totals by weighting sampled units according to their probability of selection. The study used both simple random sampling and purposive sampling.

Simple random sampling

The study used simple random sampling when selecting PTA and SMC members and teachers of selected schools in Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District.

Page | 3 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling was applied when selecting district education officials and head teachers of selected primary schools in Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District.

Data collection instruments

Questionnaires and interviews were used in the collection of data. An interview guide and questionnaires were used to generate answers from the respondents during the research. These were convenient for getting firsthand information from respondents.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were used because they were easy to administer and economical to use. The instructions were clearly indicated to guide the respondents on how to answer the questions. Questionnaires were structured in a manner which helped the researcher obtain the required information from the teachers.

Interview

The study employed the interview method because it is viewed as an interactive method that attempts to build rapport with the potential participants and gives an opportunity to respondents to explicitly communicate their perspectives on the subject. An interview guide was used to question respondents to generate answers, which were recorded on paper. This method was used to collect information from head teachers.

Research procedure

After the approval of the proposal, the study received an introductory letter from the School of Postgraduate Studies, Team University. This letter introduced the researcher to the participants in this study in their respective places in Buikwe District. A visit to the projects was made to explain to the respondents the nature of the study. This created rapport prior to collecting data. The selected schools were visited, and the researcher personally administered the

questionnaires to the respondents. The filled questionnaires were collected on an appropriate day. The questionnaires were conveyed to the respondents by use of the drop-and-pick-later method. The study had to assist some respondents who were not literate enough with the questionnaire items while collecting primary data. The empirical data collected were edited, coded, analysed, interpreted and presented using frequency tables, means and standard deviations. After that, conclusions and recommendations were made, and this report was written.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure quality instruments, validity and reliability checks were conducted as explained below;

Validity of the Instrument

In this particular study, the designed questionnaire was scrutinised by the researcher's supervisors to evaluate the items in the instrument, in order to ascertain whether they aided in answering the objectives of the study. Content validity index (CVI) was computed to ensure that the measure included an adequate and representative set of items that tap into the contribution of community participation to road service delivery in Uganda.

CVI = items declared valid/total number of items

CVI = 50/62

CVI = 0.833 (83.3%)

The reliability score of 0.8 was above 0.7 as recommended by Amin (2005) and revealed the validity of the instrument used.

Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure reliability, the research instruments were pre-tested, and data were collected and analysed. A micro field research exercise was carried out to enable the researcher to select the key questions that would enable her to obtain the relevant data for the topic under study.

Qualitative responses obtained from the group of 10 respondents and pretested using the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, a feature embedded in SPSS, revealed that the items were positively correlated to one another.

Table 2: Reliability results

Variable name	Alpha result	Number of questions
Community participation planning	.529	12
Community participation in implementation	.420	14
Community participation in maintenance	.828	10
Road sector delivery	.785	14
Total	$\sum$ 2.562	50

Source: primary data

With an overall reliability result of (0.700) obtained, hence $\sum$ (alpha)/number of variables (n) where $\sum$ (alpha)=2.562 and n=4, it can be said that the instrument was reliable, as supported by Sekeran (2003) who contends that the reliability score equal to or greater than 0.7 reveals that the instrument is reliable.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis

The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse data. After participants responded to the questionnaires, raw data were cleaned, sorted and entered using a statistical data entry form designed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software for analysis according to the objectives of the study. Questionnaire data was obtained from questionnaires. Each questionnaire was given a unique serial number. Extracting of inertial summaries by data reduction using soft numbers coding by categorising data, sorting and filling was carried out. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 23 was used to aid the processing and summarising of information obtained from the questionnaires.

Qualitative data analysis

Field notes were written, grouped into themes and sub-themes, and work was edited at the end of each working day to ensure accuracy in recording and consistency in information given by respondents. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. Themes derived from the study variables were identified and put in coding categories. A scheme of analysis was worked out following the coding categories, using content analysis, quotations and the most occurring ideas on every question

Ethical Issues Consideration

The study adhered to appropriate behaviour in relation to the rights of the respondents. The respondents were allowed to give consent to participate and were asked not to write their names or those of their schools on the questionnaire. Permission was first sought from relevant authorities, and a letter was granted to allow the researcher to carry out the research. The study assistant explained the purpose of the study to the respondents and assured them of the confidentiality of their responses and identities.

In an effort to safeguard the respondents in this research, the researcher followed four ethical doctrines. The first one is deliberate consent, which necessitated that the respondents were not forced to participate in the research. Respondents were educated about the nature of the research before they participated. The respondents were also informed that participation was voluntary and they had the right to pull out of the study if they were not content. The researcher thus allowed the participants to freely agree to participate in the study.

In the same regard, the respondents remained unidentified during the study as a condition to ensure their privacy. The researcher protected the identity of the respondents by substituting their names with pseudonyms.

Lastly, each respondent was reminded that the information obtained from them was completely intended to support the study. This implies that all the information that was collected was used for research, and persons' names and official titles were omitted in the report.

Results

Response rate

Table 3 indicates that out of the sample size of 96 expected participants, 83 managed to participate in this study, which was an 86.5% response rate. This confirms that the participation of the target respondents in this study was satisfactory.

Table 3: Response rate

Respondents' category	Sample size	Response rate	Percent
Head teachers	8	6	75
Chairmen SMC	8	5	62.5
District Education Department	4	3	75
Teachers	76	69	90.8
Total	96	83	86.5

Source: Primary data, 2025

Table 4. Biographic information of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	31	45	45
Female	38	55	100
Total	69	100	
Age groups			
18-30	21	30.4	30.4
31-40	35	50.8	81.2
41-50	7	10.1	91.3
51 and above	6	8.7	100
Total	69	100	
Marital status			
Single	21	30.4	30.4
Married	48	69.6	100
Total	69	100	
Education level			
Tertiary	55	79.7	79.7
University	14	20.3	100
Total	69	100	

Source: Primary data, 2025

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 4 indicates that the majority of the respondents (55%) were male, while females were 45%. This implies that there are more male teachers than female teachers in Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District. This shows that either gender was fairly represented in the teachers' sample and therefore was thought to give balanced views for the study. The high number of male teachers showed that more male teachers have led to a higher retention rate of boys in comparison to girls. This revealed that the Sub-county has more male representation in education matters, depicting that more males than females go through tertiary and higher education.

Table 4 shows that the majority of the respondents (50.7%) belonged to the age bracket 31-40 years, whereas a small minority (8.7%) belonged to the age bracket 51 years and above. This implies that UPE schools in Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District, have young and energetic staff who are capable of performing their duties effectively.

Table 4 indicates that the majority of the participants (70%) were married, whereas a minority (30%) were single. This shows that most of the primary school teachers in UPE schools in Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District, are mature and responsible and can perform their duties responsibly.

Table 4 indicates that the majority of the respondents (79.7%) had a tertiary level of education, including diplomas and Grade III certificates, whereas a minority (20.3%) had a university level of education, including Bachelor's and postgraduate degrees. The majority of the schools sampled had respondents who had attained an education below the degree level. This indicated that there was a lack of role models in their classes, and the number of those with certificates was higher in comparison to those having degrees.

The effects of family income on pupil dropout in UPE schools in Nyabihoko Sub County Buikwe District

Regarding research objective one which sought to establish the effects of family income on pupil dropout in UPE schools in Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District, respondents were asked to indicate whether their position was based on a five-point Likert scale. The analysis was done using the percentages, mean and the standard deviation. A mean above 3 indicates agreement by respondents, a mean of 3 shows undecided and a mean of below 3 shows disagreement by respondents. The standard deviation (Std) of close to 1 shows agreement, while the standard deviation of close to zero shows the disagreement of the respondents. The analysis further grouped 'strongly agree' and 'agree' to mean 'agree'; and 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' to mean 'disagree'. The elicited responses are shown in Table 5

Table 5: The effects of income on pupils' dropout in UPE schools in Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District

Statement	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	Std.
Pupils drop out of school to look for income generating activities so as to assist their parents in raising income for the family	6 (8.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	28 (40.6%)	35 (50.7%)	4.41	.895
Pupils drop out of school because their parents have low income such that they are unable to afford basic needs such as food, clothes	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	41 (59.4%)	28 (40.6%)	4.51	.904
Students drop out of school to assist in taking care of their young sibling so that the parent/guardian can go and work	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	34 (49.3%)	35 (50.7%)	4.10	.846
Financial status of households does not influence access and retention of pupils in public primary (UPE) schools	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (10.1%)	48 (69.6%)	14 (20.3%)	4.39	.792
Though the user charges have been abolished in primary schools, there are other "hidden costs" hindering access to education in a public primary school	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	42 (60.9%)	27 (39.1%)	4.30	.664

Source: Primary data, 2025

Table 5 shows that respondents agreed with the statements put to them, If the mean a mean which is above 3, and their standard deviations were close to 1. The respondents' responses were as follows.

The majority of the respondents (91.3%) agreed that most pupils drop out of school to look for income-generating activities so as to assist their parents in raising income for the family (Mean 4.41; Standard deviation 0.895). This

shows that it is absolutely right that most pupils drop out of school to engage in income-generating activities. These findings are confirmed by one of the key informants, who had this to say:

"The majority of the parents in this area live in abject poverty, and the worst of it all is that we are in a peri-urban setting. Most of the parents in my school are single mothers who are engaged in petty businesses which cannot sustain their families. This has forced them to engage their children

in various economic activities to be able to make both ends meet. In the end, children drop out of school to be able to earn a living....” (HM KII_2).

Also, all respondents (100%) agreed that most pupils drop out of school because their parents have low income, such that they are unable to afford basic needs, particularly food and clothes (Mean=4.51; Standard deviation= 0.904). This implies that the low income of the parents greatly compromises their children’s dropout from school. This finding is supplemented by interview findings from one head teacher who said:

“When a parent is poor, the possibility of his/her children dropping out of school becomes high. Such parents cannot motivate their children to strive higher and get educated; they instead discourage them by giving them examples of those who are not educated and rich in their locality...” (HM KII_1).

In addition, all respondents (100%) agreed that most students drop out of school to assist in taking care of their young siblings so that the parent/guardian can go and work (Mean 4.10; Standard deviation 0.846). This indicates that

some pupils dropped out of school to take on family responsibilities from their parents.

Findings show that the majority of the respondents (89.9%) agreed that with the introduction of UPE, the financial status of households does not influence access and retention of pupils in public schools (Mean 4.39; Standard deviation 0.792). This implies that UPE has no influence on the retention of pupils in schools in the context of the socioeconomic background of pupils.

Finally, all respondents (100%) agreed that though the user charges had been abolished in primary schools, there were other “hidden costs” hindering access to education in public primary schools (Mean= 4.30; Standard deviation= 0.664). This implies that the other charges, such as exercise books, pens, pencils, uniforms, clothing, lunch, building funds and labour for classroom construction, to be met by the parents, had greatly contributed towards school dropout in UPE schools. This implies that the abolition of school fees without putting into consideration the burden of such charges does not stop school dropout in the area, considering people’s economic status.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics on pupils' drop out

Statement	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	Std.
Some pupils do not complete the cycle	0 (6.67%)	0 (3.33%)	0 (6.67%)	21 (53.33)	48 (30%)	4.25	.817
The number of dropouts in school is very low	0 (10.0%)	20 (3.33%)	7 (3.33%)	21 (53.33)	21 (30.)	3.62	.705
The school dropout out in this school is declining	0 (0.0%)	7 (6.7%)	0 (20%)	35 (46.67%)	27 (26;67%)	4.19	.879
The school environment encourages pupils to stay in school	0 (3.33%)	7 (3.33%)	6 (10%)	42 (56.67%)	14 (26.67%)	3.91	.836
It is school-related issues that influence the completion of the cycle	0 (10.0%)	0 (6.67%)	0 (13.3%)	42 (36.67%)	27 (43.3%)	4.39	.692

The results analysis of findings in the table above revealed that out of a total number of 69 respondents who were targeted, 6.67% strongly disagreed and 3.33% disagreed that some pupils do not complete the cycle, while 6.67% were not sure, 53.33% agreed, and 30% strongly agreed with the statement. When the respondents were asked whether the number of dropouts in school is very low, 10.00% strongly disagreed, 3.33% disagreed, 3.33% were not sure, 53.33% agreed, and 30.00% strongly agreed.

Of the 69 respondents, 46.67% agreed, and 26.67% strongly agreed that the school drop out in this school is declining. On the other hand, 20.00% were not sure, 6.67% disagreed, and 0.00% strongly disagreed.

When the head teacher was interviewed, he said that both the student and parents had a negative attitude toward learning. When invited to talk about the child’s completion, they do not turn up. When the respondents were asked

whether the school environment encourages pupils to stay in school, 3.33% strongly disagreed, 3.33% disagreed, 10.00% were not sure, 56.67% agreed, and 26.67% strongly agreed. This implies that the school environment encourages pupils to stay in school

When the respondents were asked whether students are grouped in class with a particular assignment, the results showed that 20.00% disagreed, 16.67% were not sure, 53.33% agreed, and 6.67% strongly agreed. On the other hand, the following results were obtained when the respondents were asked if they treat all students without bias when they come for consultations. The results showed that 3.33% strongly disagreed, 10.00% disagreed, 6.67% were not sure, 36.67% agreed, and 43.33% strongly agreed.

Page | 8

. The respondents generally agreed that it is school-related issues that influence completion of the cycle, as shown by the results: 10.00% strongly disagreed, 6.67% disagreed, 13.33% were not sure, 63.33% agreed, and 6.67% strongly agreed.

Correlation matrix

Table 7: Correlation matrix

Variables		1	2	3	4
Pupils' dropout (1)	Pearson Correlation	1	.393**	0.083	0.08
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.001	0.254	0.262
Family income levels (2)	Pearson Correlation	.393**	1	.447**	0.155
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.001		0	0.109
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.254	0		0.119
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.262	0.109	0.119	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Results show that there is a significant relationship between socio-economic factors and pupil dropout in terms of family

income levels ($r=.393$, $p<0.01$). This implies that family income levels contribute to pupil dropout in the study area.

Table 8: Regression results:

Model 1	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	Beta		
(Constant)		4.195	0
Family income levels	0.437	3.323	0.002
Model summary			
R	0.41		
R Square	0.17		
Adjusted R Square	0.125		

a. Predictors:(Constant), Family income levels, Early pregnancy, parents' literacy levels

Regression results

From the results obtained, it is revealed and confirmed that family income levels are the only socioeconomic factor that has a significant effect on pupil dropout ($\beta=0.437$, $P<0.05$).

Discussion

Results on the effects of family income on pupil dropout in UPE schools found that pupils drop out of school to look for income-generating activities so as to assist their parents in raising income for the family. This was attributed to the fact that the majority of the families have no income to cover basic needs for pupils. Findings further revealed that the education of most pupils in UPE schools is being catered for by mothers as fathers have abandoned their responsibilities in favor of alcohol drinking. It was found out that most pupils are engaged in activities like coffee harvesting, stone quarrying, vending and motorcycle washing in trading centers. The practice has attracted more pupils to follow suit, and this has greatly increased the rate of school dropout in Buikwe Town Council, Buikwe District. In the case of Buikwe Town Council, what has been observed is that when pupils get involved in economic activities and earn money at an early age, they gain independence and eventually decide to drop out of school in the long run. Thus, the involvement of pupils in economic activities has a strong influence on school dropout among UPE schools not only in Buikwe District but in Uganda at large. The study also established that the majority of the parents in the school were of low economic status, as attested by the majority of the teachers, which depicts that the parents' socio-economic status influenced school dropout. The majority of the parents were small-scale farmers and, owing to their poor economic status, faced challenges in catering for the extra fees not catered for by UPE. Thus, the pupils were forced to be away from school before their parents paid for the extra fees. The pupils were also forced to participate in income-generating activities to boost their family income, and owing to their poor economic status, faced challenges in catering for the extra fees not catered for by UPE. Thus, the pupils were forced to be away from school before their parents paid for the extra fees. The pupils were also forced to participate in income-generating activities to boost their family income. The pupils' school participation was affected by the inability of the parents to cater for the school provisions such as uniforms and reading materials, which are essential for learning.

It has been suggested that the economic efficiency of households in peasant societies increases with greater total work input from children. The poor families value the earnings forgone and unpaid work in the household, and this is manifested in less demand for education among the poor, who have, on average, more school-going-age children than higher-income families.

Conclusion

Poverty in households also influences dropping out. This is because even with the provision of free primary education, there are other non-fee costs of education that many parents cannot pay, such as the costs of uniforms and exam levies. Failure to pay these costs may force a pupil out of school. Also, poverty explains the huge numbers of students who leave school to look for work in the district. Poverty among parents has led to school dropout. A big majority of parents are small-scale farmers and petty traders. Owing to poor economic status, they face challenges in paying the extra levies that are not catered for by UPE. Their children are forced to stay away from school as they look for the money. In many cases, pupils just drop out of school. Pupils are also forced by poverty to engage in income-generating activities to supplement family income. It is also the opinion of teachers that some parents are negligent and prefer their children to drop out and get involved in coffee harvesting, and in extreme cases, girls get married when they are still teenagers.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the government and other stakeholders in the education sector should seek to increase the funding for UPE to cater for all the schools' monetary requirements in order to cushion pupils from poor economic backgrounds from dropping out of school. Measures to reduce poverty amongst households: Policy makers should encourage households in BUIKWE Town Council to engage in commercial farming, which brings them income. Households should also be encouraged to take children of school-going age to school and not make them go to the farm during school hours. The district should also help pupils from poor families with scholastic materials like books, pens, mathematical sets and uniforms. High birth rates amongst households should be reduced; this can be done through family planning methods, in order for the household to afford the fees for the few children in the household. These will greatly reduce school dropout.

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List of abbreviations

MoEs : Ministry of Education and Sports
EPRC : Education Policy Review Commission
UPE : Universal primary education
SPSS : Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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Conflict of interest

The author did not declare any conflict of interest

Data availability

Data is available upon request

Author contribution

Lubaale Mustafa collected data and drafted the manuscript of the study

Dr Mulumba Fawz supervised the study

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Page | 11

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