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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF READING CIRCLES IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION IN AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension instruction in classrooms can be tough because students have many different reading levels and learning needs. Reading Circles give students a chance to work together and understand texts through group tasks. I wanted to describe how Reading Circles were used to teach reading comprehension and to point out the problems the teacher faced in a school. I used a qualitative case study design in a ninth-grade English class at an inclusive school in Medan, North Sumatra. I gathered data by watching the classroom, interviewing people, and looking at documents; then I sorted the data, made charts, and concluded. I found that using Reading Circles meant preparing the reading materials, putting together mixed-ability groups, explaining the steps and roles, leading the group talks, getting students to speak up, and giving extra help based on each student's needs. The teacher watched the groups and tweaked instructions to help students who learn in different ways. Still, many challenges showed up. Students were confused about their roles and reading levels; some lost focus, and the teacher had a heavy load keeping an eye on many groups. I solved these problems by explaining things, simplifying the instructions, helping directly, and encouraging peers to support each other. In the end, the study shows that using Reading Circles in an English classroom needs flexible teaching, steady support, and constant adjustments so that all students can thrive.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching, Implementation, Inclusive Classroom, Reading Circles, Reading Comprehension.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is one of the most fundamental competencies in language learning, including English as a foreign language. More than just the ability to recognize words and sentences, reading comprehension is a complex, multi-layered cognitive process that involves the ability to interpret literal and inferential meanings, critically evaluate information, and integrate the text's content with the reader's prior knowledge and experience (Grabe, 2009). As the foundation for nearly all cross-disciplinary learning activities, from the natural sciences to the social sciences, this skill has a profound impact on students' overall academic success. In the context of English in Indonesia, reading comprehension is becoming increasingly important given English's role as the medium of instruction for international science and as one of the competencies formally assessed in various national assessment instruments and college admissions exams.

This study focuses on the implementation of reading circles as a learning approach in teaching reading comprehension in inclusive schools. Specifically, this study aims to observe, describe, and analyze how reading circles are implemented in classrooms that accommodate both regular students and students with special needs simultaneously, as well as the extent to which this approach can facilitate improvements in reading comprehension skills for all

students without exception. The choice of this topic is motivated by the fact that inclusive education has become the global standard for educational practice, while the search for a learning approach that can truly accommodate the diverse learning needs of students in inclusive classrooms, particularly in English literacy instruction, is still ongoing and has yet to yield a comprehensive solution.

One example of an inclusive school that reflects this situation is an inclusive school located in Medan, North Sumatra. This school integrates Islamic values with a nature-based learning approach and accommodates students with diverse learning needs within a single classroom. This environment is relevant to the focus of this study because it provides a real-world context in which teachers implement various learning strategies, including collaborative approaches such as reading circles, to manage inclusive English language learning.

However, empirical evidence shows that Indonesian students' reading skills remain at an alarming level. The issue of low reading skills becomes even more complex when viewed in the context of inclusive schools. Inclusive schools, as mandated by the Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009, require regular schools to accept students with special needs and provide them with educational services on an equal footing alongside regular students within the same learning environment. In practice, this means that an inclusive English teacher must teach in a classroom that includes students with highly diverse learning profiles, ranging from typical students with varying abilities to students with dyslexia, mild hearing impairments, specific learning difficulties, or other developmental challenges that directly affect their ability to process and comprehend written text. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) emphasize that the real challenge of inclusive education is not merely placing students with special needs physically in regular classrooms, but ensuring that all students receive meaningful and high-quality learning experiences.

Reading circles, also known as literature circles in some literature, have emerged as one promising response to this question. Systematically developed by Harvey Daniels (2002) in his work Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups, reading circles are a small-group learning model in which each member plays a designated role, such as Discussion Director, Summarizer, Vocabulary Enricher, and Connector, in discussing texts collaboratively and meaningfully. This approach is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that the construction of knowledge occurs through social interaction and language, as well as in Rosenblatt's (1978) reader-response theory, which views the meaning of a text as the result of a dynamic transaction between the reader and the text. In an inclusive context, reading circles offer a structure that is naturally flexible and adaptable: the available roles allow for differentiated participation without stigmatization, so that students with varying ability levels can contribute meaningfully to the same discussion.

Although reading circles have great potential as a learning tool, the success of their implementation depends heavily on the teacher's competence and strategies in managing them, particularly in complex inclusive school settings. Teachers are required not only to understand the technical procedures for implementing reading circles but also to be able to identify each student's individual learning needs, design appropriate instructional differentiation, create an inclusive and collaborative classroom climate, and conduct ongoing formative assessments to monitor students' reading comprehension progress (Tomlinson, 2014). In the Indonesian context, this challenge is further complicated by the fact that many teachers have not received adequate training in inclusive education or in implementing collaborative learning approaches, such as reading circles.

Most existing research on reading circles has been conducted in the context of homogeneous regular classrooms, while studies focusing on students with special needs are generally carried out in separate special education or remedial settings. Thus, a significant

research gap can be identified: there has been no research that comprehensively examines the implementation of reading circles in teaching reading comprehension in inclusive schools in Indonesia, where regular students and students with special needs learn together in the same classroom. This study aims to fill that gap by offering a new perspective on how reading circles can serve as an inclusive learning tool, one that not only enhances reading comprehension but also creates a space for equal participation for all students, regardless of their ability differences.

In practical terms, the findings of this study are expected to provide evidence-based guidance for inclusive English teachers, helping them understand how reading circles can be designed and facilitated to be truly meaningful for all students. Furthermore, this study is also expected to provide constructive input for education policymakers and teacher education institutions in designing professional development programs that are more responsive to the realities of inclusive classrooms in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design to look at how Reading Circles were put into practice in a reading comprehension lesson in a classroom. A qualitative approach was chosen because the focus was on understanding how the lesson was carried out, how students interacted, how they reacted, and what problems arose, rather than on measuring success with numbers. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a case study lets researchers dig deep into a system in its real-life setting. In this study, the small system was the use of Reading Circles in one Grade IX English classroom during the 2026 school year. The case was limited to one classroom, one teacher, one implementation of Reading Circles, and the time period when the activities were observed. This design let the researcher see how Reading Circles was carried out and how regular students and students with disabilities responded in the classroom.

The research took place at a school in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The study involved students from Grades VII–IX and one English teacher. Participants were chosen from one Grade IX class of 27 students. From that class, eight students were selected as the participants: six regular students and two students with disabilities. The English teacher was also an informant because of her direct role in teaching the lessons. Purposive sampling was used to pick participants who could give information for the study. Sugiyono (2017) says purposive sampling means selecting people based on the study's purpose. Choosing students from both groups let the researcher examine how they joined in, interacted, and reacted during Reading Circles. The teacher supplied information about how lessons were run, how the classroom was managed, and what challenges came up. The results were meant to give a look at this particular classroom, not to generalize to all-inclusive classrooms.

The researcher was the tool for gathering and making sense of the data. To get views from different angles, the study used four complementary ways to collect data: non-participant classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and field notes. Observation focused on how Reading Circles were run, the teacher's role in guiding learning, how regular students and students with disabilities talked to each other, how the steps of Reading Circles were completed, and any situations that arose during the activities. During observation, the researcher stayed out of the lesson. Watched instead. This helped the researcher record the learning as it happened and see how Reading Circles was carried out. Spradley (1980) says observation helps researchers understand actions in real settings. Observation data were used to describe the lesson process and spot patterns of participation, teamwork, and trouble that appeared during the implementation.

Semi-structured interviews were held with the teacher and the chosen students who took part in Reading Circles. The student interviewees were both students and students with disabilities. Interviews were held after the activities so that participants could think about

what happened and give details about their involvement. Interview questions covered how Reading Circles was set up, what participants felt while learning, how the classroom interacted, and what difficulties came up during the activities. The semi-structured format let the researcher stick to the topics while asking more questions when needed for clarification or more detail. Interviews added to the observation data by giving insight into experiences and views that might not have shown up during the lesson. Creswell and Poth (2018) say interviews are useful for digging into participants' experiences and interpretations.

The student interview participants consisted of students and students with disabilities. These students shared their thoughts about how Reading Circles worked for them. Interviews were held after the learning activities so that participants could think back on what happened and share their experiences. This timing helped the researcher get thoughtful responses about how Reading Circles felt to each student. Interview questions focused on how Reading Circles was organized, what the participants felt during the process, how the classroom interaction went, and what problems were faced while using Reading Circles. These topics were chosen because they show how the strategy worked and what challenges the inclusive classroom met.

The semi-structured style let the researcher follow the questions while asking follow-up questions when more detail or clarity was needed. This approach helped the researcher understand the meaning of the students' and teacher's experiences with Reading Circles. Interviews worked together with the observation notes to give a picture. They added details about feelings and thoughts that the observer could not see directly. This combination made the study stronger and more accurate.

Creswell and Poth (2018) note that interviews help explore what participants think and feel about a phenomenon, like Reading Circles in a classroom. The researcher used documentation to add to and check against the information the researcher gathered from observations and interviews. The documents the researcher collected included the lesson plan (Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran or RPP) that the researcher prepared, teaching materials or modules that were samples of students' work, photographs of learning activities, and school documents that were relevant. These materials gave me information about the lesson preparation, learning activities, and students' responses to the strategy. Document analysis also helped me compare the planned teaching activities with the classroom practices that the researcher observed during the lessons. Bowen (2009) explains that document analysis can provide evidence and support findings obtained through other qualitative methods. The researcher also used field notes to record classroom events, interactions between the teacher and students, students' responses, and other relevant observations during the research activities. These notes complemented the observation records and helped preserve contextual details that could contribute to the later interpretation of the data.

The researcher obtained data from secondary sources. Primary data were information collected directly through classroom observations and interviews with the teacher and selected students. These data were evidence for examining the implementation of Reading Circles, classroom interactions, student participation, and challenges occurring during learning. Secondary data were supporting documents, including the RPP, teaching materials, student work samples, photographs, relevant school documents, and academic literature about Reading Circles, reading comprehension, qualitative research, and inclusive education. Government policies about education were also consulted. Using these sources allowed me to examine the phenomenon from multiple angles and connect observed classroom practices, participants' accounts, and supporting documents.

The researcher followed the model proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and

verification. The analysis was carried out by organizing and interpreting information from observations, interviews, documentation, and field notes. During data condensation, the researcher reviewed all collected information, selected data that answered the research questions, and grouped information into categories. The initial categories focused on the implementation of Reading Circles, the teacher's strategies, student participation, interactions between regular students and students with disabilities, and challenges during the learning activities. Information that did not directly address the research focus was given less emphasis, while relevant information was kept to preserve the meaning and context of participants' experiences. This process helped me arrange the collected data into units for further interpretation.

In the data display stage, the researcher organized the condensed information into descriptive narratives, tables or matrices and selected interview excerpts where appropriate. Observation records were examined alongside interview responses and relevant documents to spot recurring patterns, similarities and differences across the data sources. For example, descriptions of classroom interactions were compared with participants' accounts of their experiences and with the records of learning activities. This process helped me develop a systematic understanding of how Reading Circles was implemented and how students participated in the learning process. Bazeley (2013) notes that organizing and displaying data can help researchers spot patterns and build interpretations from the collected information. In the final stage, the researcher concluded by interpreting the categories and patterns identified earlier. The emerging conclusions were then verified by revisiting the observation records, interview data, field notes, and supporting documents to ensure that the interpretations were grounded in the evidence. The three stages were treated as activities rather than separate steps, allowing me to revisit and refine interpretations when needed.

To verify the trustworthiness of the findings, the study focused mainly on credibility by using triangulation. In research, trustworthiness means how well the research process and results are believable, consistent, and backed by the evidence collected. Sugiyono (2011) says that triangulation is one way to check the credibility of research data. In this study, methodological triangulation was done by comparing data from collection methods. First, the researcher compared the teacher's Students' interview answers with what was seen during classroom observations. Second, the teacher's explanations of the process were compared with the teaching practices seen in the classroom. Third, the observation and interview results were looked at together with the RPP, teaching materials, student work samples, photographs, and other relevant documents. Field notes were also used to clarify the context of interactions or responses. These comparisons helped find information that matched well as well as differences that needed more interpretation. The researcher did not assume that all sources would give the same accounts; instead, the researcher treated discrepancies as potentially meaningful parts of the classroom context.

The scope of this study was limited to one Grade IX English classroom, one English teacher, and eight chosen student participants. Because of this, the findings were meant to give a picture of how Reading Circles were used, not to prove the strategy works for a larger student group. The qualitative case study design did not use tests or experimental comparisons because the main goal was to describe the instructional process and understand participants' reactions within the chosen setting. Although the study included students and students with disabilities, the small number of chosen student participants limited how well the findings could show the experiences of all students in inclusive education. Using data sources and methodological triangulation was therefore key to creating a well-supported interpretation of the case. By describing the research context, selection, data collection steps, analysis stages, and trustworthiness checks, this study gives

methodological details that may help other researchers evaluate the findings and apply similar methods to comparable inclusive English classrooms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Data Condensation Results

A. The Implementation of Reading Circles in Teaching Reading Comprehension

No	Strategy	Data Source
1	Preparing the lesson by selecting an appropriate reading text and preparing students before the activity	Interview: *"First, I explain the learning objectives, and then I introduce what Reading Circles are."* Observation: Teacher explained objectives before grouping students.
2	Forming heterogeneous groups to encourage collaboration among students with different abilities	Interview: *"After that, I divided the children into several groups. I took the single-seat desks and arranged them in two rows, forming four circles, making six in total, and the remaining children were divided into three groups of five."* Observation: The teacher arranged students into six small groups to facilitate collaborative reading and discussion.
3	Encouraging the participation of both regular students and students with special educational needs during discussion	Interview: *"If it comes to regular students, they're actually quite good, sis." There are a few children who really seem happy when asked to discuss. They immediately focus, and some even help their friends right away, sis. But not everyone is like that. Some are quieter, maybe still a bit shy. Then some are noisy with their friends, just chatting away, so I have to remind them again. "If it's a special needs student... umm... of course, the process is a bit different for them. Like Azam and one other, they can't directly follow all the stages like their other friends." Still confused with the instructions I give, they are more... what should I say... attentive before they start speaking.* Observation: Regular students showed varying levels of participation. Students with special needs participated with teacher and peer support.
4	Guiding students during group discussions by monitoring each group and giving clarification when needed.	Interview: *"During the activity, I also kept walking around. If there is a group that looks confused, I approach them again. I explain again using simpler language. Then I also intentionally mixed the children's abilities in one group. So, the hope is that they can help each other. In my opinion, that's quite helpful, sis.*

		Observation: The teacher actively moved around the classroom, assisted struggling groups, and simplified instructions during the activity.
5	Providing inclusive support by simplifying instructions, using peer assistance, and giving additional guidance to students who needed it.	Interview: *"So, I don't force them to be as active as other students. The important thing is that they still participate in my class."* Observation: Students with special needs received additional assistance.

B. Challenges in the Implementation of Reading Circles

No	Challenge	Data Source	Solutions
1	Students had different reading abilities and learning speeds.	**Interview:** *"Especially in an inclusive class, the children's abilities are indeed different, right? Some quickly grasp the material, while others need it explained several times."* **Observation:** Students showed varying levels of reading comprehension and participation during the Reading Circles activity.	The teacher repeatedly explained the procedures, gave simple examples, and clarified each role before and during the activity.
2	Students were unfamiliar with Reading Circles and were confused about their roles and responsibilities.	**Interview:** *Many students still ask, 'Miss, what should I do?', or 'Miss, which is my task?' There are even some who still ask, 'Miss, is this to be read?' I also have to repeat the explanation about their roles several times.* **Observation:** Several students asked for repeated instructions and showed confusion about their assigned roles before starting the activity.	The teacher grouped students heterogeneously and provided additional assistance to students who experienced difficulties.
3	Some students were easily distracted and talked about unrelated topics during group discussions.	**Interview:** *"...the most difficult part is during group discussions, sis." Because I'm the only one in the class.* *"For example, when I'm helping group 1, sometimes the other groups start to get confused again; some get noisy. So, I have to go back and forth from one group to another".* *"Some students also prefer to stay quiet, so they need to be encouraged before they start talking. Well, that's what I think is quite draining, sis.* **Observation:** Some students became distracted or talked with their peers during the activity, requiring the	The teacher monitored each group, reminded students to stay focused, and redirected discussions when necessary.

		teacher to remind them to stay focused.	
4	Managing several discussion groups simultaneously increased the teacher's workload	**Interview:** *"The most difficult part is during group discussions. I'm the only one in the class, so when I'm helping one group, the other group sometimes starts to get confused or even quarrel." I have to go back and forth between one group and another...* **Observation:** The teacher continuously moved between groups to assist, making it difficult to support all groups at the same time.	The teacher simplified instructions, provided direct assistance, and encouraged peer support within the groups.

DISCUSSION

A. Implementation of Reading Circles in teaching reading comprehension in an Inclusive School

The results showed that Reading Circles were implemented using connected teaching methods. These methods included getting ready with learning materials, talking about Reading Circles and what each person does, making groups with kinds of students to help group talks happen, pushing students to take part, offering support that includes everyone checking how students are doing, and ending the class. As the main person who gives information, the teacher acted as someone who helped students throughout the learning process. The teacher kept changing how they taught based on what the students needed. This way of doing things matches the idea of Reading Circles that Daniels (2002) talked about. Daniels described Reading Circles as group talks where students read the same text, do specific jobs in the discussion, and learn together by talking. This study also showed that the way it was done focused on working, giving each person a job, and having students take part instead of just the teacher talking all the time. These classroom actions also show the features of Student-Centered Learning. In this setup, students take a role in learning while the teacher helps when needed.

The way it was done also showed the ideas of learning that Johnson and Johnson (1989) explained. Their theory says that good teamwork needs people to depend on each other, each person to be responsible for talking face to face to have social skills, and to look back on how the group worked. These ideas were clear during the use of Reading Circles, especially when students talked about what they read and did their jobs as assigned. Helped each other with group work. Even though not every talk went perfectly, the group activities let students share ideas and slowly understand better. This result supports the idea that Reading Circles are not just a way to read but also a real example of teamwork in English classes, especially in places where students have different school and social backgrounds.

Anderson and Corbett (2008) found that Reading Circles work better when teachers give instructions, mix up the groups, help students step by step, and give clear jobs to students with different learning needs. Also, Widodo (2016) said teachers are very important as guides by helping with talks, offering help, and choosing the books to help students talk and learn together. Similarly, Shelton-Strong (2012) argued that successful implementation of Literature Circles in EFL classrooms depends on careful planning, explicit explanation of discussion roles, suitable reading materials, and continuous teacher facilitation to help students engage actively in collaborative discussions. These findings are consistent with the

implementation observed in this study. The teacher selected reading materials appropriate to the students' level, explained the Reading Circle procedures repeatedly, simplified instructions whenever necessary, and continuously monitored group discussions to ensure that all students remained actively engaged throughout the learning process.

There were some differences between this study and earlier ones. Earlier studies mostly looked at Reading Circles in classes or checked how well they worked after students knew the method. This study looked at the time Reading Circles were used in an inclusive class where both the teacher and students were trying the strategy for the first time. Because of this, the teacher had to explain over and over, give help, and change how they taught throughout the class. Instead of asking students to do every role perfectly, the teacher focused on making sure each student could take part in a way that fit their ability. This shows that using Reading Circles in classes needs more teaching changes than what was seen in past studies.

The results add something to what is already known by talking about Reading Circles beyond just how good they are at improving reading. Earlier studies mostly looked at student results. How well they did. This study shows how Reading Circles can be used in an English class through real teaching methods and the teacher changing how they teach. The new part of this study is explaining the process of using Reading Circles for the first time in a mixed-ability classroom. It shows that the success of the method depends not only on the jobs in the discussion but also on the teacher's ability to change how they teach, help people work together, and give the right help for each student's different needs.

B. Challenges faced by the teacher in implementing Reading Circles in Teaching Reading Comprehension in an Inclusive School.

The use of Reading Circles in classrooms shows that this method gives children the chance to learn together, but there are several challenges that teachers must handle. According to this study, the main problems include students having skill levels that do not match how the learning works, managing the classroom during group talks, and teachers working harder to watch over many groups at the same time. Because Reading Circles are new in classrooms, these problems affect how well they work.

The results of this study match research by Ainscow (2020), which shows that differences in students' school abilities are a problem for group learning in inclusive classrooms. For students with skills to learn together, teachers must change how they teach. The study says that the success of education depends not only on the methods used but also on the teacher's ability to help each student in the way they need. Teachers need to change their methods so that students with different skills can learn together. The research shows that the success of education depends not only on the strategies used but also on the teacher's ability to provide help that fits each student's needs.

In the steps of using Reading Circles, students still need time to learn how the discussion works, to work well together, and to get used to the jobs they have in the group. This was seen in this study when some students were still confused about the steps of the activity, so the teacher had to give the instructions again before the activity could go better. The finding about teachers working harder is also similar to research by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2020), which explains that teachers in classrooms have more complicated jobs than teachers in normal classrooms. Teachers not only teach but also check on each student, give one-on-one help, and manage learning in a group with different students. This was clear in this study when the teacher had to move between groups to make sure all students stayed involved in the Reading Circles.

However, this study has some differences from other work. Most studies on Reading Circles look more at problems like managing time and students being ready for group talks. How well the strategies help with reading skills. For example, Kaya Tosun and Doğan (2020)

said the main issues when using Literature Circles were about managing the time for discussions and students getting used to the roles they had. In that study, the work was done over meetings so students could get used to the method slowly. Unlike that study, the problems in this research were more because of the way the classroom was set up. The fact that the work was only done in one meeting. The teacher had to deal with students who were not used to Reading Circles. They also had different levels of learning. Because of this, the teacher needed to give the instructions many times, give more help, and keep the whole group involved during the activity. So, the problems found in this study came not from the way the strategy worked but also from the students and the inclusive classroom setting.

This study is also different from the research by Hong et al. (2020), which was done in a classroom that used technology and had students who already knew how to work. In that study, the problems were more about how students built knowledge. In contrast, this study shows that at the middle school level in inclusive classrooms, the main problems are about students getting used to working together and teachers knowing how to handle different types of students.

Earlier studies mostly looked at the problems of using Reading Circles in classrooms or connected them to better grades. This research explains that the problems of using Reading Circles in classrooms are not just about schoolwork but also about students having different skills getting used to new ways of learning, managing the classroom better, and teachers needing to help all the time. These results show that how well Reading Circles work in classrooms depends a lot on the teacher's ability to use teaching methods that can change and fit each student's needs.

CONCLUSION

The current research is trying to figure out how Reading Circles can help students understand what they read better in school, including all kinds of students. It also wants to find out what problems come up when teachers try to use Reading Circles in their classes. This study is looking at how teachers can help students learn, how students get engaged in their work, and what the teacher's job is. How to ensure all students can participate, even if they have special needs.

The research found that Reading Circles can be done in steps. First, the teacher gets ready. Then the students are put into groups. After that, the students. Talk about what they read. The teacher helps the students. Makes sure they understand what they are doing. The teacher also helps students who need assistance. Even though this was the teacher's first time using Reading Circles, everything went well, and the students kept working together to read.

There were also some problems when the teacher tried to use Reading Circles. Some students learned faster than others. Some did not understand what they were supposed to do. The teacher had a hard time helping all the groups at the same time. This made the teacher's job more difficult. These problems show that using Reading Circles in a classroom with all kinds of students requires a lot of planning and teacher support.

Overall, this study shows that Reading Circles can be a way to teach students in inclusive school classrooms. Reading Circles can help kids understand what they read better. Even though it is not perfect yet, the students and teachers are still getting used to it. The study also shows that the teacher's ability to adapt and help students is very important for Reading Circles to work. The teacher needs to be able to help students work together and make sure each student gets what they need to learn. Reading Circles can be a tool for teachers to use in their classrooms to help all students learn and understand what they read

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