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Challenges of In(ex)clusion in the Space of Higher Distance Education in Brazil

Desafios da In(ex)clusão no Espaço da Educação Superior à Distância no Brasil

Viviane Spadaro Di Gesú[1*]

Roberto Gimenez[1]

[1] Universidade Cidade de São Paulo/ UNICID – Rua Cesário Galero, 448 -Tatuapé - São Paulo, SP - Brasil.
*vivianedigesu@gmail.com

Abstract

This article aims to discuss the topic of inclusion in Brazilian higher education, especially under the context of distance education. Considering the social function of higher education institutions, it was identified how undergraduate students with disabilities were treated in Brazil, entering the field of accessibility in virtual learning environments used in higher education courses in Brazil distance mode. The study pointed out that the inclusion in the academic space of higher education is a challenge, aggravated when submitted to the context of distance education. Timid legislation on inclusion and actions, especially technological, aimed at providing accessibility on higher education are still far from guarantying the right to education for all.

Keywords: Inclusion. Students with disabilities. Distance education. Higher education.

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Resumo

O presente artigo se propõe a discutir o tema inclusão no ensino superior brasileiro, em especial, sob o contexto da educação à distância (EAD). Considerando a função social das instituições de ensino superior (IES), identificou-se como se deu o tratamento dos alunos com deficiência em nível de graduação no Brasil, adentrando ao campo da acessibilidade nos ambientes virtuais de aprendizagem (AVA) utilizados em cursos superiores na modalidade à distância. O estudo apontou que a inclusão no espaço acadêmico de nível superior é um desafio, agravado quando submetido ao contexto da formação à distância. A legislação tímida acerca da inclusão e as ações, sobretudo tecnológicas, voltadas à provisão de acessibilidade no ensino superior à distância ainda estão longe da garantia do direito à educação para todos.

***Palavras chave**: Inclusão. Alunos com deficiência. Educação à distância. Educação superior.*

1. Introductory notes

This article presents a study on the inclusion process in Brazilian higher education. From a literature review on the subject, it is observed the fragility of the social role of higher education institutions in Brazil that guarantee little the effectiveness of educational rights to society. Entering the discussion about the need for accessible and inclusive higher education courses, it was observed how the HEIs have been forwarded to their practices.

Although the need for inclusion is something defended in the field of education, the faces are not always visible from this process, which thus allows the condition of exclusion of students with special demands. Still subject to limited access, students with disabilities face complex difficulties when they move on to higher education.

Legal acts materialized in the public policy space, but found obstacles in their effectiveness. The distance modality in higher education began to take attention from the discussions of educational policies since it gained important space in the field of teaching in Brazil. Thus, discussing the elements of accessibility in distance education centers as well as in virtual learning environments is a major challenge towards inclusive education.

2. Faces of in(ex)clusion in higher education

We know that the university is responsible for the social function of forming critical, autonomous and participatory citizens, from the promotion of culture to all students, without distinction. This is made possible when higher education institutions (HEIs) develop, above all, science. According to Demo (1993), the soul of academic life is constituted by research, as a scientific and educational principle, that is, as a strategy for generating knowledge and promoting citizenship, thus research is fundamental in a university context.

In this respect, the University should present itself as a first space of inclusion par excellence, capable of enabling training to the diversity of students, without exception, which includes students with or without special needs. However, it is also recognized that the issue of inclusion in Brazilian higher education is a somewhat challenging topic. This is because for this endeade to be fulfilled satisfactorily, and in fact inclusive, it is important that the HEI develop, maintain and implement inclusion policies (access to higher education, monitoring of the educational process, encouraging the permanence in the course, among others) and that they are preferably institutionalized so that it can actually promote the routine of inclusive culture in its various practices.

> The inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education has to be focused on the aspects that concern everything that involves the subject in their daily relationships. And this cannot be thought of from isolated actions, but needs to bring together actions with a view to the acquisition of products and technologies; actions aimed at social attitudes and policies for the inclusion of entry and permanence of people with disabilities, as well as related to the support that educational institutions need, such as in the scope of the research they carry out, in the financing of infrastructure aimed at training and education, among others. (SIQUEIRA; SANTANA, 2010, p. 134-135)

The timid inclusive project in the Brazilian HEI is a great difficulty. The lack of public inclusion policies endorses the obstacles because they are not sufficient for inclusive origin in the educational field.

> Legal options are undoubtedly important and necessary for inclusive education in Brazilian higher education, although by itself they do not guarantee the implementation of inclusive policies and programs. An education that is important for inclusion must necessarily have investments in pedagogical materials, in teacher qualification, in adequate infrastructure for entry, access and permanence and be attentive to any discriminatory form. (MOREIRA, 2005, p. 43)

Removing the exclusion of the university space means more than pedagogical actions. Measures are needed to include the complexity existing in the teaching space, which includes structural (material), technological and human (athenalydand or behavioral) elements. According to Ferreira (2007), inclusion does not only mean inserting the person with limitations or difficulties within the education system, but rather preparing this environment to receive it.

The academic preparation to meet the demands of students with disabilities is complex and at the same time fundamental. It involves multiple investments, palpable and objective to subjective and implied, i.e., from adaptations of spaces and equipment (real estate, machinery, systems and software), qualification of people (teachers and employees) to paradigmatic, political, cultural and interpersonal changes. Thus, the discussion of inclusion part of the visible to reach the invisible, to the deep of the interactive process of human coexistence that cannot be achieved by the naked eyes and for this exact reason becomes difficult to concrete. Burci (2016) highlights:

> Forms of exclusion still exist, not only directed to them, but to the various social categories. We believe that disability is in the way we think and look at each other. Social inclusion is nothing more than a constant struggle for the elimination of aspects that still arouse exclusionary acts and actions aiming at a social modification. Inclusion seeks to equate

> between all, providing opportunities for equality without the use of discrimination. (BURCI, 2016, p. 33)

Breaking with resistance and, therefore, with the distancing from the different, from what "gives work", from what does not entail the pattern (of the devious) and thus of what cannot be shaped to the massification imposed by the monetary and economic reality known to be of scale, advocated by a capitalist society and incorporated into higher education, is an unattractive path, especially for those who would have in hand the power for its change.

To escape the routine, working with exceptions is not a simple, comfortable and pleasant task, especially when working with large volumes of students and the productive logic says there is no time for the exception (as the reality of universities is configured). Transpose segregations, prejudices and discrimination is a complex route and therefore requires choice. Moreira (2004) points out that the university must broaden the meaning of its social function, so that people with disabilities are no longer categorized by the way of inefficiency, deviation, atypical and unproductive and to them are guaranteed the right to equate opportunities and education.

Pacheco & Costas (2006) say that studies on the access and permanence of students with disabilities in Higher Education Institutions in Brazil show that initiatives to provide them with support to meet their needs are isolated and insufficient. Promoting inclusive higher education implies four conditions: allowing access, permanence, departures and continuities (the latter involving the return of this student with special needs to a higher than completed degree course – as is the case of a lato or strictu sensu postgraduate course). For Castanhos and Freitas (2007), given the difficulties faced by students with special educational needs attending higher education, it is indispensable that the university offer a quality education, because before being guaranteed a right, fully recognized, it is the state's duty to implement actions that favor not only their admission, but also their permanence and exit from higher education.

3. Brazilian higher education and students with disabilities

It is important to remember that, historically, higher education began its activities in Brazil with eleitized views, that is, it was destined to wealthy people. The poor did not compete in culture. Oliven (1992) states that the creation of the first Brazilian universities retained the elitist and, at the same time, merely professionalizing the courses.

Even less, higher education was the case for individuals with disabilities, who would have difficulty in performing productive work. It was up to him to treat under medical logic, and therefore considered as a disabled individual, who needed treatment, but not education. This individual, in this way, would have the maximum right to health, care, depending on medical professionals rather than teaching professionals.

This scenario reaffirms education as a response and reflection of a society. A country under the social context (not to mention economic and financial) excluding and prejudiced could not generate if not an exclusionary education, interested in separating, and why not say hide its anomalies and undesirable stumbles. According to Matiskei (2004), inclusion and exclusion are facets of the same reality: discussing mechanisms to enable social, economic, digital, cultural or school inclusion means admitting the intrinsically excluding logic present in the current modes of organization and social production that one wants to modify.

Rossetto (2008, p. 52) recalls that 1950 was the emancipatory landmark of individuals with disabilities in higher education in Brazil. That's because blind people were allowed by the National Board of Education to enroll in an HEI, the Faculty of Philosophy. The author also recalls that until 1980 few people with dis-

abilities, for various reasons, accessed higher education. Among the causes would be low schooling due to limited access or non-access to basic education, rehabilitation treatments, special appliances, adapted public transportation, financial resources, ignorance of rights, family insecurity, among others.

It was after the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 that the theme of inclusion began to be treated as a right in the educational field. For this reason, the discussion of inclusion is too late in Brazil, gaining ground in the 1990s. The 1994 Salamanca declaration produced from the Unesco World Conference on Special Needs corroborated educational reforms for students with disabilities. The Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB) 9394/96 contributed to the inclusion in higher education.

Ordinance No. 1,679/1999 (1999), "Provides for accessibility requirements for people with disabilities, to instruct the processes of authorization and recognition of courses, and accreditation of institutions". Decrees were also enacted to endorse regulation in favor of students with disabilities. Decree No. 3298/99, considers, for the purposes of the law, in its article 3:

> I – deficiency – any loss or abnormality of a psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function that generates inability to perform activity, within the standard considered normal for humans; II – permanent deficiency – that which has occurred or stabilized for a period of time sufficient to not allow recovery or be likely to change, despite new treatments; and III – incapacity – an effective and marked reduction of the capacity for social integration, requiring special equipment, adaptations, means or resources so that the disabled person can receive or transmit information necessary for his personal well-being and the performance of function or activity to be performed. (BRAZIL, 1999)

The National Education Plan for 10 years (Law No. 10,172/2001) reinforced the guarantees for adequate conditions for students with disabilities, in the search for inclusive education and accessible to all.

The 2008 National Education Policy also addresses diversities, indicating educational actions towards students with disabilities, professionals working with these students as well as educational institutions.

Educational accessibility emerges a quality education to students with disabilities. It was only in 2003 with Ordinance No. 3284/03, which establishes the mandatory adjustments accessible for studies, that the HEIs were led to promote accessibility to obtain recognition of the courses and institutional accreditation for higher education. In this sense, the building, spaces, furniture and equipment began to be adapted to serve the undergraduates. It is important to define what accessibility is according to Art. 3 of Law 13.146/2015:

> [...] possibility and condition of scope for the safe use, with safety and autonomy, of spaces, furniture, urban equipment, buildings, transport, information and communication, including its technology systems, as well as other services and facilities open to the public or private for public or private use of public or private use, both in the urban and rural areas by people with disabilities or reduced mobility. (Brasil, 2015)

Through different decrees such as Decree No. 5,296/2004 (Accessibility Law), Decree No. 5,626/2005, Decree No. 6,949/2009, Decree No. 7,612/2011 and also Ordinance 3,284/2003 of the MEC, public and private HEIs received guidelines to promote actions, interventions and adaptations capable of allowing accessibility in universities. Thus, the evaluation instruments related to the processes of recognition of higher education courses require spaces, equipment and processes adapted and or with assistive technologies.

4. The challenge of inclusion in distance higher education in Brazil

If dealing with inclusion in face-to-face higher education is already a challenge, when considering higher education in the distance modality, the issue becomes more delicate. The discussion becomes about students who not only or necessarily access the university (or its face-to-face pole) through physical means, but also and mainly promote their learning through the virtual learning environment (AVA).

The distance mode in Brazil began in the 19th century, but it was only in 1996, with Law 9,394, that the EAD had its first regulatory framework. It was an educational public policy in the field of distance education, still initial, with a view to resolving the low access of students to the higher level. Other regulatory acts were enacted in order to better direct the expansion of this educational process still under construction in the country. With diverse models, higher education institutions currently offer university education at their various levels under this modality (undergraduate and graduate).

> The growing demand for education, due not only to population expansion, but mainly to the struggles of the working classes for access to education, to socially produced knowledge, concomitantly with the evolution of scientific and technological knowledge is requiring changes in the function and structure of the school and university. (PRETI, 1996, p.11)

Distance education has passed through the printed book, by mail, by radio, by TV, reaching the electronic media, reaching expressive numbers of students and today presents itself as a form of education in potential for unprecedented growth. In his studies, Gatti (2001) draws attention to the advancement of higher education and graduate studies in the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s. Although present in Brazilian public education, distance education has advanced under the private field. According to Chauí (2001), private education has taken over the country, and today, this number has increased more and more. In addition to "face-to-face" courses, undergraduate and graduate distance courses proliferate.

This is how distance higher education gains space, promoting a substantial movement in the pedagogical field. The concept of Distance Education in Brazil was officially defined in Decree No. 9,057 of May 25, 2017:

> Art. 1º For the purposes of this Decree, distance education is considered the educational modality in which didactic-pedagogical mediation in teaching and learning processes occurs with the use of means and technologies of information and communication, with qualified personnel, with access policies, with compatible monitoring and evaluation, among others, and develop educational activities by students and education professionals who are in different places and times. (BRASIL, 2017)

In this context, the student (with or without disabilities) is faced with a different reality of study, since his contact with the course occurs mainly from a distance tutor, who assumes the role of teacher and, therefore, facilitator of teaching in the DISTANCE modality. Thus, the student of higher education experiences his/her training trajectory, especially in front of a computer and, rarely, personally participating in a face-to-face activity that this time does not necessarily occur in the university space, but of the pole to which it is linked. Thus, new actors of this formative process and a new scenario for study are observed.

According to Preti (2002, p. 25), "Distance Education is, first of all, education, it is human formation, it is an interactive process of heteroeducation and self-education". Education is a process that conditioned the possible situations of being experienced by the subject. In the case of distance education at a higher level, there is the undergraduate in action with its object of study, in the face of the challenge of learning.

Their positioning, their choices of studies is what will give the tone of their trajectory of intellectual development. The other actors of this educational process will compose this scenario by being present in the learning journey.

Subjects enter higher education at a distance, starting to study at a university, but maintaining, in the space of their homes, their work, or any other space that allows them access to the online platform of study. The WEB allowed online and offline interaction in education, deconstructing limits for studies. In EAD, the WEB environment can provide texts, teacher orientations, libraries, evaluations, and perform chats, forums, e-mail (PORTO et al, 2004). Materials can have several formats: presentations, spreadsheets, texts, interactive or non-interactive animations, and others.

Carlini and Ramos (2009) emphasize the need for a multidisciplinary team to work in the processes of preparation and evaluation of EAD courses. This team that is part of an academic course in the distance modality corresponds to teachers, tutors; production team, designers, designers, diagrammers, etc. For the production of materials, the organization of educational tools as well as the transmission of content, it is necessary to make use of different resources: human, material, technological, financial.

The process of inclusion and accessibility must assume transversality in all these resources. It is important to remember that, according to Sassaki (2009), there are different dimensions for accessibility, which guide various spaces, including distance education, are them:

(a) Architectural: promote the rupture of physical barriers between people with and without disabilities. Associated with physical structural adjustments in buildings with a view to ensuring access for individuals with disabilities to the same environments as people without disabilities (in the case of distance education, this would apply to the face-to-face pole or physical space of the university).

(b) Communication: corresponds to the rupture between barriers in personal relationships between individuals with and without disabilities. This dimension is related from the adequacy of languages (LIBRAS, Braile, virtual communication) to the establishment of affective bonds between individuals in a group situation (in distance education this dimension is revealed in teaching materials and interaction via learning platform).

(c) Methodological: corresponds to the adequacy of teaching methodologies with a view to ensuring the reception, as well as the learning of people with disabilities in the teaching environment. It is worth mentioning that this dimension is permeated by conceptions about what it is to teach and learn, about the orientation of the pedagogical project, be it, by competencies or contents, as well as about the evaluation system itself. The EAD must, therefore, pay to its pedagogical proposal adapted to the student with disabilities.

(d) Instrumental: corresponds to the adequacy of devices, utensils, computer programs, equipment, and other physical resources to maximize the learning conditions of individuals with disabilities. Inclusive virtual tools are directed to this dimension in the field of distance education.

(e) Programmatic: corresponds to the rupture of barriers ranging from public policies oriented to accessibility, to the adaptations that occur in pedagogical projects, in the norms of the educational institution and in the scope of its management. The higher education institution meets this dimension, regarding the distance modality, according to its pedagogical process to the student with disabilities.

(f) Atitudinal: corresponds to the dimension of the prevailing values and attitudes in an organization of the educational institution in front of people with disabilities. In particular, it permeates the entire institutional project, involving from management, faculty, staff and student body. It is a more comprehensive perspective that can be identified through behaviors that denote prejudice in relation to diversity.

The number of students with disabilities enrolled in HEI is still little significant in view of the total enrollment in higher education in the general population, which totaled 7,305,977, of which 1,137,851 in federal institutions, 604,517 state institutions, 190,159 municipal, and 5,373,450 in private HEIs in 2013 (Inep, 2013).

Dealing with the reasons for the low access of people with disabilities in higher education is unknown, because the practice of institutions is to allow the student freedom to identify himself or not as disabled. Many choose not to point out their condition of special need. There is, therefore, a flawed gap in the approach and reception of the student to higher education, as Mazzoni (2001) points out.

> [...] why is the number of students with special educational needs so small compared to the total number of students enrolled in higher education? A first assessment leads us to observe that there is no information system prepared to capture the actual data, due to the identification of people with disabilities only in the vestibular competition, and only for those who wish to identify themselves as such. (MAZZONI et al, 2001, p.68)

The undifferentiated treatment in contexts that require differentiation capable of enabling equity causes damage to the inclusive process by opening spaces for the evasion of this student and because it does not say the invitation to his expulsion as a result of the non-provision of his demands. The need for inclusive policies to access the right to education is the starting point for the student's entry into the university space. The second step lies with the policies of maintenance of the study in the teaching space, which avoid the evasive process of students with disabilities and advancing even further, a third step is in inclusive policies for graduates, capable of allowing the evolution of this student to which it is responsible for its degree.

According to Sassaki (1997), the practice of social and educational inclusion rests on principles hitherto considered unusual, such as: the acceptance of individual differences, the valorization of each person, the coexistence with different social groups and learning through cooperation. Higher education in distance learning is based on collaborative learning. Through this perspective, students with or without disabilities interact with peers as well as tutors to promote their learning. The virtual environment of inclusive learning provides this interactive experience from peer-to-peer exchange activities, which bring together forums, chats, web conferences, among others.

Thus, it is observed the challenge of higher education at a distance that must meet the dimensions of accessibility in its teaching practice. As for information technology, higher education institutions seem to be more attentive. Using assistive technological tools, EAD seeks to promote greater independence for students with disabilities, with accessibility features such as increased lyrics, audiotext, subtitles and videos in Brazilian sign language.

> [...] developed to help people with disabilities get to perform the same actions that people without disabilities do without the aid of technology. Common technologies can also become assistive if they meet this need. Assistive technology aims to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and therefore also include them in society, allowing them to become socially active citizens and enjoy their constitutional rights. (BURCI, 2016, p.110)

5. Accessibility tests in virtual learning environments

The support of assistive technologies is essential to higher education in the distance modality. When these resources are combined with appropriate teaching methodologies, there are important allies to the educational inclusion process in this educational field.

Different types of disability require different technological tools capable of enabling distance education. Communication and Information Technologies, called ICTs can compensate for and minimize the difficulties encountered by people with disabilities, some learning disorders such as dyslexia, the old or illiterate, and thus provide solutions in the form of Assistive Technologies or Technical Aid, as Santarosa puts it (2012):

> Ensuring access to digital information and communication technologies to an increasing number of users, democratizes the possibility of interaction in the universe of digital networks and, therefore, stimulates and qualifies inclusive education practices. Digital accessibility consists of: (1) ensuring that people, regardless of sensory and cognitive characteristics, can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with digital information and communication technologies;(2) allow the use of computer systems interspersed with Assistive Technologies; (3) provide tools for protagonism and individual and collective authorship for human diversity. (SANTAROSA, 2012, p. 221)

For visually impaired people, the magnifying glass, narrator, and virtual keyboard feature are used. In relation to deaf students, it is necessary to make use of resources focused on the Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS). Subtitles, screens with interpreters promote accessibility.

Some examples of Assistive Technology for users with motor and/or speech limitations would be keyboards, hives, keyboard mask with caps, weight strap, sharpener or tip, mouthpiece, vocalizer, mice and special triggers, pedal trigger (SONZA, 2008). There are still other resources and tools that help students with disabilities learn through the virtual learning platform.

In order to identify how the higher institutions that offer distance learning courses have dedicated themselves to inclusion, the Brazilian Association for Distance Education (ABED) promoted an analysis of the data obtained by the 2018 EAD.BR Census. The investigation sought to observe whether we are ready to serve students with special needs.

The data exposes a significant number of institutions that do not carry out actions that promote inclusion (18.5%). In the best situation, the number can still be considered low: only 20.7% of institutions offer assistance to interpreters of the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). As for the technological resources offered, there is a small improvement, although far from the ideal framework.

The figures show that accessibility features are not yet fully inclusive. The best results are due to adapted assessments and computers with accessibility features, which, respectively, are present in 55.56% and 52.59% of distance courses. The research pointed out that only 19.26% of the materials are offered in Braille, which demonstrates, for example, that a student with visual impairment in a distance learning course like this, will not be able to understand much of the course content. .

There is still a limited reach of virtual learning environments (VLE), even though this is the main tool for studying students in distance learning courses, which for this reason needs to meet the inclusive dimensions.

Fully distance courses do not have even half (50%) of their resources in the condition of accessibility. In this context, only 40.74% of the resources make it possible to read screens, for example. Thus, the results show that most higher education institutions have little preparation for promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities - as recommended by the Brazilian Inclusion Law. A significant portion of potential students with disabilities in higher education, which could even mean fulfilling an important social role. This scenario indicates the need for further discussion in the field of the inclusion of higher education students with disabilities in the distance learning space.

Taking as a basis the barriers pointed out by Sassaki (2009), it is understood that the inclusion proposals associated with distance education, can overcome some obstacles such as architectural, methodological and instrumental. The first one, due to the nature of the modality itself, which presupposes a specific form of interaction. In this case, the fact of being at a distance does not imply substantial differences between students with and without disabilities. Secondly, with regard to methodological and instrumental accessibility, it is possible that, for the time being, they are forgotten in view of the powerful tools that affect a large number of individuals. However, possibly, adjustments that would occur in the face-to-face modality and that emerge from the teacher-student interaction processes, can be harmed, leaving a detailed analysis oriented to the effective demands of the student with disabilities by the agents that compose the process. Above all, when taking into account that they are institutions of Higher Education, it would be appropriate to think about their role towards promoting knowledge on the subject, contributing to the reduction of eventual conceptual barriers. Fundamentally, it is also understood that greater reflections are needed in the context of Higher Education Institutions in order to cultivate more favorable environments, to inclusion and respect, contributing to attitudinal accessibility.

6. Final considerations

The study sought to identify the process of inclusion in higher education, considering distance education, which has been increasingly present in Brazilian HEIs. It was observed that meeting the demands of students with special needs comprises a range of dimensions not always present in the space of universities. Serving structural, methodological, instrumental, pragmatic and attitudinal elements, as pointed out by Sassaki, is a great impasse to HEIs and even more so in distance learning courses. In this way, there is a systemic complexity in the educational field that is difficult to be satisfied or at least understood.

The theme of accessibility and inclusive practices is opposed to paradigms that are often hidden or omitted. There is little interest or effort aimed at equalizing everyone's right to education, with regard to access, permanence, exit and continuity. Glimpsing fragile practices through legislation, but little defined about accessibility, universities launch themselves, especially, technological tools to assist their students with disabilities.

With courses that are not very inclusive, candidates for higher education access processes that direct them more through evasion. The efforts of professionals and technological tools in distance education do not always meet the demands of students with disabilities. The absence of institutionalized inclusive policies in the HEIs impeded the effectiveness of accessibility to higher education for students with disabilities. Exclusion still seems to be a reality in these educational spaces, which means an inconsistency through the social function demanded by HEI, by society.

In part, this difficulty implies a difficulty for the existence of advances, in addition to architectural, methodological and instrumental accessibility, such as conceptual and attitudinal ones, which must permeate the projects of Higher Education institutions with distance courses.

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