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Utilizing M-Reader for Extensive Reading: Implications for Seminarian Identity at Mataloko Seminary

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Abstract

Introduced in 2021, M-Reader is a digital application designed to promote Extensive Reading. Mataloko Seminary, recognizing its potential, has employed M-Reader to enhance both student literacy and identity formation. With this context in mind, this research sought to answer two pivotal questions: (1) How has Mataloko Seminary integrated Extensive Reading into its curriculum? and (2) To what extent does Extensive Reading via M-Reader influence the identity of seminarians on their journey to the priesthood? Employing a narrative inquiry methodology, the study meticulously examined the application of M-Reader in extensive reading practices and its consequent impact on seminarian identity. Data was meticulously collated through semi-structured interviews with three students from grades 10 and 12, all hailing from Mataloko. This data, systematically categorized and analyzed using Microsoft Excel, revealed that M-Reader-supported extensive reading at Mataloko Seminary adheres to ten established principles of extensive reading. Furthermore, the program emerged as a pivotal tool in molding the seminarians' identity across four critical dimensions: human, intellectual, pastoral, and spiritual. These findings underscore the potential benefits for other educational institutions targeting comprehensive identity development: the incorporation of extensive digital reading tools like M-Reader can be a game-changer.

Keywords: Extensive reading, M-Reader, narrative inquiry, seminarian's identity

INTRODUCTION

Reading competence holds paramount importance in language acquisition. Patel and Jain (2008) argue that its significance surpasses that of speaking and writing skills. Through reading, students not only assimilate knowledge but also reinforce and broaden their linguistic grasp. Echoing this sentiment, Bernhardt (2010) posits that students proficient in reading exhibit greater resilience and consistency in their English learning trajectory.

Nonetheless, the manner in which reading activities are conducted can pose challenges. Pang et al. (2003) note that the methods and strategies employed by educators can render reading tasks intricate and monotonous for students. Such experiences can

adversely affect students' enthusiasm and engagement in reading. To mitigate these challenges, innovative teaching techniques are imperative. Extensive Reading (ER), championed by many as an exemplary approach to enriching reading experiences. Day and Bamford (2004) describe ER as a practice where students read broadly for comprehension, information, and pleasure. This approach is underscored by ten guiding principles, among which are the accessibility of easy reading materials, a diverse array of topics, autonomy in choice for learners, and reading as an inherently rewarding activity (Day & Bamford, 1998).

In addition, Extensive Reading (ER) and its impact on students' competence have garnered the attention of several researchers. Shiki (2011) highlighted how ER has positively influenced reading speeds among university students in Japan. Similarly, Renandya (2016) found that ER enhances students' linguistic abilities and overall knowledge. Taking a broader view, Erp (2021) meta-analysis affirmed that ER bolsters reading proficiency and advocated its inclusion in standard language curricula. An instrumental tool facilitating ER is the M-Reader application, developed at Kyoto Sangyo University, Japan. This Moodle-based course management system offers graded reader books tailored for educators and students alike. Designed with an emphasis on extracurricular reading, M-Reader ensures students remain accountable for their reading activities. A unique feature is its quiz system, which provides ten random questions per book, encompassing different formats like short answers, true or false, and event ordering (Day, 2015). Impressively, this freely accessible platform now boasts over 8,000 quizzes. The integrated database, which records users' reading metrics, including books read, identity, grades, and word count, streamlines the tracking of reading progress for both educators and students (McBride & Milliner, 2016). Studies reflecting on M-Reader-assisted ER implementation suggest students not only show a preference for this approach (Rajabpour, 2020) but also evolve into more independent learners (Damen, 2018).

In the context of this research, we delved into the implementation of Extensive Reading (ER) as supplemental, out-of-class assignments at Mataloko Seminary. Since 2021, the seminary has incorporated the M-Reader-facilitated ER program into its curriculum, aiming to foster the identity formation of its seminarians. This emphasis on identity formation aligns with the insights of Balo (2005) and Schmidt (1951), both of whom underscored the significance of adopting strategic approaches to guide seminarians in their journey toward priesthood. The program's flexibility allows students to engage with a variety of books at their leisure.

The decision to embed ER within the seminary's curriculum reflects the institution's unwavering commitment to nurturing the multifaceted identities of seminarians, encompassing spiritual, pastoral, human, and intellectual dimensions (Congregation for the Clergy, 1994). Offering a deeper perspective, referenced by De Gregorio et al., (2022) as well as Vistocco and Dellagiulia (2022), posited that the Catholic understanding of identity can be juxtaposed with psychological interpretations, especially in a cross-disciplinary context. This layered conception of identity aligns with the frameworks proposed by the Congregation for Clergy. Previous research on seminarian identity provides further insight. For instance, a study by De Gregorio et al. (2022) highlighted the positive role peer attachments play in identity development and overall well-being. Conversely, Ramlino and Niron (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of the '*correctio fraterna*' program – a series of structured sharing sessions – at Labuan Bajo Seminary in bolstering seminarian formation, resonating with both seminary and broader national educational directives.

While many studies have explored the role of Extensive Reading (ER) in boosting students' linguistic competence and motivation in English learning, as well as the shaping of seminarian identity through peer attachment and the '*correctio fraterna*' activity, a distinct gap remains. Specifically, there is a limited body of research on the implementation of out-of-class ER programs using M-Readers and their direct influence on seminarian formation within seminaries. To address this gap, our study seeks to understand the ER practices at Seminary Mataloko and determine the influence of ER on seminarian development, drawing insights from participants' narratives.

METHOD

This research aims to explore both the implementation and the subsequent impact of Extensive Reading on seminarians' identity development at Mataloko Seminary. To achieve this insight, we embarked on a longitudinal study using a qualitative approach. We opted for narrative inquiry as our primary method to deeply grasp participants' experiences, drawing inspiration from their personal stories, as emphasized by [Barkhuizen et al. \(2013\)](#). [Clandinin and Connelly \(1998\)](#) identify the core elements of narrative inquiry as "living, telling, retelling, and reliving" (p.28). They highlight the importance of forming and nurturing relationships to gain a genuine understanding of the shared narratives. Given this perspective, the lead researcher, affiliated with the seminary, maintained close ties with the participants. This proximity allowed for continual feedback and validation, ensuring the interpretations resonated with the participants' experiences, aligning with the guidelines set by [Creswell \(2012\)](#).

Supplementing our methodology, [Nasheeda et al. \(2019\)](#) indicate that narrative studies often merge multiple methodologies to craft meaningful narratives from study transcripts. By closely adhering to these principles and methodologies of narrative inquiry, we aspire to vividly portray the evolving identities of seminarians as they immerse themselves in the Extensive Reading program facilitated by the M-Reader application. This study was carried out at St. Yohanes Berkhmans Mataloko Seminary, located in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. Given the seminary's bifurcated formal schooling and varied reading comprehension levels, our focus was primarily on the senior high school students. Our participant pool consisted of three seminarians: Alei, Vincent, and Rainer (pseudonyms), all hailing from Mataloko. These participants were selected purposefully, factoring in their enrollment in the ER program, their active reading habits, and frequent access to the M-Reader application, ensuring the collection of pertinent data ([Lodico, 2006](#)).

To gather insights, we employed interview guidelines composed of 29 open-ended questions, spanning six thematic sections related to the participants' vocational and reading experiences, both pre and post of their seminary induction. These interviews, conducted in Indonesian, took place virtually via Zoom Meeting from 27th March to 1st April 2023. Each participant was interviewed twice by the lead researcher, with each session lasting approximately 40 minutes. In analyzing the qualitative data, we incorporated principles from both [Clandinin and Connelly \(2000\)](#) as well as [Ary et al. \(2018\)](#). Emphasizing the principles of "living, telling, retelling, and reliving," our initial step involved transcribing the interviews. We then meticulously reviewed each transcript multiple times to grasp the participants' perspectives. Following this, data was categorized via coding, aligned with pre-

determined themes relating to reading experiences, vocational journeys, and transitions before and after entering the seminary.

Subsequently, we crafted chronological narratives for each participant, drawing from the transcripts to pinpoint specific experiences and thematic highlights. We engaged participants in reviewing these narratives on Google Docs, allowing real-time feedback. This step, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out, embodies relational responsibility in narrative inquiry, facilitating negotiation on aspects like anonymity and addressing ethical concerns. Post this collaborative review, the narratives underwent revisions to ensure chronological accuracy, logical flow, and authentic representation of experiences. As a culminating step, we juxtaposed our findings with established theories and relevant scholarly works, aiming to provide depth and context to our research results.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Alei: Finding New Chapter of Reading Journey

Alei had joined the ER program and used M-Reader since 2021. He finally found English books as a new chapter of his reading journey after reading mostly Indonesian books. He was very enthusiastic about joining this program as he found it challenging. He shared,

"Surely, I know all the books are English books, and I do really want to read them. I remember my past experience when I ran away from a tourist who visited my village because I was afraid of speaking in English. Since then, I have been interested in learning English to face that certain moment and communicate with English-speaking people."

Alei said that he took his siesta and recreation time for reading for around 90 minutes in the English room. He said that his English teacher provided printed books on the tables and digital versions on the computer. He highlighted the freedom to choose his own book and read it silently. Once he finished reading the book, he attempted the quizzes on M-Readers platform immediately. At this moment, Alei has read more than 205 books and obtained 489.754 English words.

"I want to be a book collector through M-Readers platform, and when I pass the quizzes, I feel motivated to read more."

Alei admitted that his achievement was inspired by his English teacher. His teacher gave him a reading formula that he aspired to so much. It was called "one day, one story". This formula reminded him every day. He began to read easy and picture books in order to help him comprehend the story. After being confident enough, he challenged himself to read another level of books, such as Sherlock Holmes and The Hound of Baskerville.

Vincent: New Experiences in Reading and Using M-Reader in Seminary

When Vincent was in the first grade of junior high school, his reading habits had not increased yet. He mentioned that there were two reasons. Firstly, the library was relatively far for junior high school students. Secondly, the library's student staff provided insufficient services. However, it significantly changed when he was in grade X at Mataloko Seminary. He heard from his seniors about reading activities and completing quizzes in the English room. He uttered:

"I was interested in that activity, but when I realized that the books were all English, I instantly felt scared. Lucky me, my English teacher kept motivating me as a first class in ER programs."

In line with Alei, Vincent did not want to take a nap. He preferred reading books during his siesta time. He spent approximately four to five days a week visiting the English room. When the activity began, he sprightly looked for an interesting book. He explained that his English teacher had printed out the book, including books sent by Thom Robb. He also added that occasionally, he read some books from the school library, which might have quizzed on the app. Thus, he could read both inside and outside of the English room since printed books could not be taken out of the room. Recently, Vincent has recorded 226 title books and obtained 849.486 words on the M-Readers platform.

"This app definitely encourages me to continue reading by showing my achievement."

In addition, after having used M-Reader for more than two years, Vincent uttered that he was very proud of himself for doing things that he, firstly, was afraid of. His memorable books were *The Alchemist* and *The Adventure of Tintin*. He expressed that M-Reader truly assisted him because it allowed him to trace the book. After reading and completing the quiz, the numbers of the book and its cover will be automatically attached to his account. It indicated that he had read the book and mastered a few words.

Rainer: Reading in Seminary is Fun

Rainer admitted that one of the reasons that made him enter the seminary was because of the large collection of books in the library. Since then, reading has become a habitual activity for him. In addition, since the introduction of the ER program, Rainer felt he got the opportunity to read various genres to gain knowledge. He then claimed that his reading activity through M-Reader was quite the same as his fellow seminarians. He spent 45 minutes during siesta time as well as recreation time. However, he had a slightly different story when he first used M-Reader. He openly admitted that he ventured to read a relatively voluminous novel, but he failed in doing the quiz. Thus, he was advised to begin with an easy book first. Talking about the genre of books, Rainer said that his favorite books at this moment are *Forrest Gump* and *Little Woman*, both were English novels. He was interested in novels about someone's experience or daily life. He then admitted that he learned so many moral values from the characters. He specifically explained what he learned from *Forrest Gump* Novel:

"From that book I learned that basically God has a good plan for everyone. Even people with disabilities, their life path must have been arranged by God. Our responsibility is just to keep trying and never give up whatever the obstacles are."

Furthermore, Rainer also depicted that English Room has a huge collection of books neatly arranged in a cupboard. Seminarians might pick up the books according to their level. Junior high school students usually read simple books and then use their laptops to finish quizzes. Meanwhile, senior high school students could adjust themselves. Currently, Rainer has read 110 books and mastered 429.165 words. He proudly said:

"I always felt satisfied after finishing reading a book. After taking a quiz, I used to look back at my page, and I was proud of what I had done. This makes me desire to read even more."

The Roles of Extensive Reading in the Formation of Seminarian Identity

Extensive Reading and Human Formation

Extensive Reading undeniably plays a crucial role in the human formation journey of the seminarians at Mataloko Seminary. The tales, experiences, and lessons embedded in books have left a lasting imprint on many, including Alei, Vincent, and Rainer. Alei's engagement with books has been an emotional journey. He expressed,

"I see myself in some relevant books and experiences. When I read the stories, I suddenly remembered my daily life, and I was in the same circumstance as the character in the story, who experienced laziness and became selfish."

Such memories often revolved around personal moments of loss, such as the passing of parents or dear friends. These readings were not mere passive engagements for him. Reflecting on a personal story in one of the graded books, Alei commented that such realizations have spurred actions; he actively sought to forge stronger bonds at the seminary and participate more rigorously in its activities. Vincent, too, found solace and introspection in the stories of renowned figures. He mused,

"Thomas Alfa Edison failed a thousand times in making a light bulb, and then I asked if I had tried enough. Moreover, Helen Keller definitely inspired me to keep learning even in tough conditions, and I learned to respect others."

Yet, Vincent also admitted that not every narrative resonated with him. A tangible change in his daily routine, thanks to reading, was his refined time management skills. As Vincent candidly shared,

"Reading activity does not disturb daily routines at the seminary. I could still wake up early and attend vespers even though I did not use my siesta time for sleeping." Moreover, "Read today, lead tomorrow, I could evaluate my progress. I was more disciplined because I controlled my reading phase."

Rainer's reading journey was underpinned by a strong belief. He was certain that every book opened and every story read added to his understanding, citing the influence of Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography on his perception of leadership and wisdom. Rainer's engagement with reading also brought a heightened sense of self-awareness and discipline, allowing him to remark confidently.

Extensive Reading and Intellectual Formation

Extensive Reading has proven instrumental in shaping the intellectual growth of seminarians at Mataloko Seminary, profoundly influencing their academic prowess and linguistic abilities. As these seminarians delved into the world of books, the transformative power of literature was evident in their experiences. Alei, for instance, found renewed vigor in his quest for knowledge, noting,

"I become more passionate about reading books, especially to look for more information about this world, and then there are stories about breaking the rules This story makes me not want to break the rules since I got the pictures of consequences I might face from the book I read."

The diverse collection of books and the M-Reader platform acted as catalysts for his growth. Not only did his concentration and memory benefit from this engagement, but his linguistic competencies also witnessed enhancement, particularly in listening and speaking. Alei's engagement with literature also instilled in him values of self-discipline and responsibility as he drew parallels from the narratives to his own life.

Vincent's journey with Extensive Reading highlighted tangible improvements in his reading and vocabulary skills. He commented on the systematized progression offered by M-Reader, which helped him maintain consistency. Vincent's active engagement with the text allowed him to internalize vocabulary and structures, making him observe,

"When I immersed myself in the story, I simultaneously learned English grammar."

Such exposure made real-world applications, like taking grammar tests, seemingly effortless for him. Moreover Rainer's experience echoed similar sentiments. He described reading as a window to the world, saying,

"It was truly beneficial for us as seminarians because we had limited access".

This exposure enriched his knowledge base, enhancing his comprehension skills. His expanded vocabulary bolstered his confidence in speaking, leading him to view himself as a global citizen. This holistic development wasn't limited to speaking; Rainer's writing skills also flourished, as evidenced by his contributions to publications like the Warta Flobamora magazine. Together, the experiences of Alei, Vincent, and Rainer exemplify the transformative role of Extensive Reading in honing intellectual and linguistic capacities, paving the way for holistic development in both academic and real-world settings.

Extensive Reading and Pastoral-Spiritual Formation

Extensive Reading has profoundly influenced the pastoral and spiritual formation of seminarians at Mataloko Seminary, offering insights that transcend academic realms and profoundly impact interpersonal dynamics and self-awareness. Alei's reading journey emphasized the power of empathy and compassion. Narratives of consolation and solidarity ignited a fire within him to extend a helping hand, saying,

"I learned to console them in that kind of situation. Moreover, M-Reader helped me to practice my pronunciation. I can practice my pronunciation and speaking skills. I practiced reading and spoke quickly. Hence, I prepared myself before joining that event. I also kept communicating with them."

Beyond the pages, Alei's horizons expanded as he connected with global peers, with collaborations spanning countries like India and the Philippines. He attributed his confidence in these international engagements to M-Reader. Similarly, Vincent's tryst with literature deepened his spiritual introspection. Drawn to the life stories of iconic figures like Pope Francis, he reflected,

"I learned his struggle while he was a priest as well as restoration in the Catholic Church now as a Pope."

Stories like Egg Head and Little Woman" underscored the importance of empathy and connection in his pastoral life. Like Alei, Vincent also ventured into global dialogues, leveraging the skills honed by the ER Program. His engagements with the G20 Digital

Economic Summit and United Nations meetings on poverty mirrored his commitment to larger global concerns.

Moreover, Rainer's reading pathway offered a duality of spiritual enrichment and introspection. While he delved deep into the lives of Catholic saints, drawing inspiration from figures like Mother Theresa, he also candidly acknowledged the challenges of balancing reading and spiritual discipline, saying,

"Occasionally, seminarians came late to evening prayer because of reading."

Nevertheless, Rainer's pastoral journey was characterized by storytelling and advocacy. His passion for ecological issues, spurred by activists like Greta Thunberg, culminated in initiatives that garnered international attention. Together, these narratives paint a vivid picture of how Extensive Reading at Mataloko Seminary transcends mere linguistic proficiency, acting as a catalyst for deeper spiritual reflections, broader global engagements, and a more profound commitment to pastoral duties.

Discussion

Yamashita (2013) stated that readers' individual experiences influence their decision to read. The participants of this study revealed that childhood experiences led them to their current experiences. They have their own reading journey before continuing study at Mataloko Seminary both at school and home, even though the books they read were still in Bahasa. This experience then contributed to their perception of the ER Program implementation in the seminary. This result concurred with findings from Anandari and Iswandari's (2019) research that the success of ER programs in Indonesia was mostly attributed to the home literacy culture factor.

The findings also revealed that the ER program was implemented based on the theory and ten principles of ER. The participants acknowledge that they had known ER since 2020 when it was first brought to them by their English teacher. One of them defined Extensive Reading as a chance to read various books in order to gain knowledge (Ng et al., 2019). The wide-range collection book was also endorsed by Robb from the Extensive Reading Foundation. This statement conformed to the notions about Extensive Reading as wide reading and within student's reading comprehension level (Day & Bamford, 1998; Day, 2015; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). However, it was also found that one participant skipped principle number 1. Rainer admitted that he read a tough book that was out of his competence, and as a result, he failed to do quizzes on M-Reader. His English teacher then suggested that he read easy books. It could be said that reading material is a prerequisite, and the teacher's role is pivotal in the Extensive Reading program.

Furthermore, the findings highlighted the importance of the M-Reader platform in supporting reading activity. The participants admitted that the M-Reader motivated them to read more since the application recorded their reading, provided quizzes to check students' understanding, and gave rewards in the form of scores. M-Reader allowed them to examine their general understanding by attempting quizzes and tracing the book they had finished. Mc Bride and Milliner (2016) stated that M-Reader encouraged students to read significantly and regularly. Thus, the presence of M-Reader improves students' reading motivation as well as the effectiveness of the ER program (Hougham, 2020; Fajardo, 2021).

Based on the findings, the ER program also played an essential role in some of seminarians' identity formation aspects. The implementation of the ER program, including

the reflection culture in seminary, helps students to identify and self-internalize their identity as seminarians by helping them see who they are and what others expect them to be (Ardi et al., 2023; Ardi et al., 2023). The participants mentioned they contemplated themselves through a particular character and plot in the story and then picked up moral values from books they read.

The implementation of Extensive Reading using M-Reader contributes mostly to the seminarians' intellectual aspect. As a fundamental aspect of humans who participate in the light of God's mind and wisdom (Paul II, 1992), Extensive Reading provided a wide range of reading materials that assisted the seminarians in broadening their knowledge (Day, 2002). The participants acknowledged that they read more consistently and acquire more vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and speaking and writing skills. These findings relate to Mukti (2022), who stated that ER equipped the students with English skills and made them more confident and disciplined in learning (Day 2002; Krashen & Lao, 2018; Krashen, 2003). In the matter of taking responsibility for science and technology innovation, it could be said that the participants had developed themselves by using the M-Reader online application as their reading platform. Signing up for an M-Reader account, doing the quizzes, and evaluating reading achievement using an e-learning platform were the evidence that priest candidates developed their intellectual aspect more positively. This aligned with Ogbenika and Akalue (2022), who said that science and technology, mainly digital media, can threaten authentic seminarians' formation. Therefore, its positive aspects must be addressed rather than its negative influence on the Church's future leaders.

Furthermore, regarding the pastoral aspect, the participants also admitted that the implementation of Extensive Reading using M-Reader impacted their pastoral formation. They were more confident to be responsive to daily life situations and able to work collaboratively with other people from different backgrounds. Reading books (especially novels) helped the participants to be in someone else's shoes. Therefore, they practiced to position themselves in the people they will serve and guide. For the human aspects, most participants mentioned how the implementation of Extensive Reading using M-Reader helped them to balance their mind and heart, thoughts and feelings, physically and spiritually (Paul II, 1992). The activities help the participants to relate what they have experienced with what happened in the books and find moral values and virtues they could believe and apply.

However, the participants felt less influenced by the ER activities in terms of spiritual formation. Books used in Extensive Reading activities are normal general books that do not specifically discuss spirituality. Therefore, the chance for the participants to learn, practice, or contemplate their spiritual lives was limited, and it affects how the implementation of Extensive Reading using M-Reader influences participants' identity formation. The researchers argue this part is already in the seminary curriculum in general, and it does not directly belong to the Extensive Reading program. Furthermore, these findings highlighted the importance of the collaboration between schools, teachers, and students in forming seminarians' identities. The school's support and the willingness of the school board to incorporate Extensive Reading in the curriculum ensure the students get the most benefits of the program implementation (Anandari & Lhaksmita, 2019). The English teachers who became role models helped the establishment of literature culture in school. Lastly, students' attitudes towards the activities and ideas in Extensive Reading, with the help of the teachers and all stakeholders, will make sure the desired identities are well established.

CONCLUSION

At Mataloko Seminary, the implementation of Extensive Reading closely aligns with its ten guiding principles. Seminarians devoted approximately 90 minutes daily in the English room, immersing themselves in graded reading materials. Upon completing each book, the M-Reader platform served as a tool to evaluate comprehension and ensure sustained reading engagement. Notably, there was an instance where a student ventured into challenging material, leading to unsuccessful quiz attempts. This highlighted the importance of adhering to the principles of Extensive Reading, prompting the instructor to recommend more accessible books.

The research findings showed the Extensive Reading initiative at Mataloko Seminary, fortified by the M-Reader platform, has proven instrumental in nurturing well-rounded seminarians, benefiting their intellectual, human, pastoral, and spiritual dimensions. The research findings also showed several limitations of this study. First, the researchers could not find direct correlations between M-Reader applications and spirituality aspect formation. M-Reader only provided a list of questions related to the content of the book. Meanwhile, the spiritual aspect led the seminarians to attend several activities such as devotional prayer and daily liturgical celebrations. Those aspects could not be found in M-Reader features, and its activities, and the teachers and other stakeholders are more influential in this formation aspect. Second, the number of participants was limited and could not capture all the seminarians' experiences. Hence, future researchers are recommended to conduct similar research using quantitative studies in different contexts of formation.

Based on the findings in this research, it is essential for the English instructor at any seminary to create other activities than what M-Reader has provided after reading sections. Considering the seminarians are priest candidates, English instructors can provide reflection questions related to the four aspects of seminarian formation. It can be used for personal or communal activity when the seminarian finishes their reading activity. Moreover, the number of collection books related to spiritual or pastoral should be added to enrich seminarians' insight.

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