

**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INTERNSHIPS IN SCHOOLS
CONTRASTED WITH UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS' VIEWS**

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Abstract

Students' internships in schools have special importance in the Teacher Training undergraduate curriculum. Schools provide the ideal setting in which students can link theoretical knowledge to direct experience, giving them the necessary contact with a genuine professional environment. In this regard, the role of the school's teacher is crucial in monitoring and giving students guidance, along with coordinated action with the university. Therefore, in this paper we first analyze the perception of undergraduate students in Early Childhood and Primary Education at University Ramon Llull in Barcelona, regarding mentoring practices at schools, and then we compare it with the university teachers' view. For this purpose two ad hoc questionnaires have been developed. The perceptions of students and teachers complement one another and might serve to shed light on the curriculum assessment process in order to help improve student internships.

Key words: *internship, university education, experiential learning, mentoring*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last few school years we have been in the midst of a period of reflection on the currently prevailing model of university teaching, a process that has put increased emphasis on the more active role of the student, while professors' role is to provide them with advice and guidance. Until recently, the chief function of the university was to plan, coordinate and transmit knowledge, but in the first two decades of the 21st century, these objectives have undergone a transformation as teaching has been reformulated and based on a system of competencies. The current organizational changes affect not only teaching methodologies, but also have consequences for learning and assessment processes (Olmos Migueláñez and Rodríguez Conde, 2011).

There are numerous authors (Goñi, 2005; Hernández, Martínez, Fonseca and Rubio, 2005, and Zabalza, 2003) that have offered reflections on competencies, but of all the contributions to the field, the competencies defined by the Tuning Project are the ones that have been used for the drafting of white papers for degree programs (ANECA, 2005).

This commitment to specific competencies that are professionally oriented (Pañellas and Alguacil, 2008, and Quintanal, 2006) calls for the creation of appropriate learning environments that foster assimilation, growth and the comprehensive development of future teachers, while at the same time laying the groundwork so that in the future these students can create socially constructive classroom scenarios and bring about the corresponding improvement in educational practice in schools.

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That's why we believe that the Internship modules represent an ideal means to this end, in that they allow for a combination within a single educational experience of the theoretical aspects of the various fields of study and an immersion in a real professional space (Alvárez, García and Iglesias, 2007). Thus, we believe it to be one of the most vital parts of the training future educational professionals should undergo (García, 2007), in that the experience requires students to confront complex situations that not only require them to apply the knowledge and skills that they have acquired in other modules within their studies, but also to display and exercise other skills that have not been acquired in the other modules (Navío, 2004 and Carson, 2004). It should also be noted that the students themselves are well aware of this (Armegol, Castro, Jarriot, Massot and Sala, 2011) and cite the Internship as one of the parts of their studies that is most important to their professional future.

Several authors have studied the central role of the complex educational space of the Internship within the process of teacher training, among them Castelló and Monereo (2001), González (2001), Schwebel, Schwebel and Schwebel (2002), Contreras, Estepa and Jiménez (2003), Shkedi and Laron (2004), López (2004), Molina (2004), Wilson and L'Anson, (2006), Roca de Larios and Manchón (2007), Wiggins, Follo and Eberly (2007), Pence and Macgillivray (2008) and Raposo and Zabalza (2011).

Others have approached the topic of the relationships forged between schools and universities through internships, namely Bullough, (2000), González, Fuentes, Porto and Raposo, (2001), Vaillant and Marcelo, (2001), Ponce de León, Goicoechea, Sanz and Bravo, (2006) and Zabalza (2011).

Others have discussed the spheres of professional growth for teachers. In this sense, we can refer to the reflections of Marhuenda (2001), Barquín (2002), Altava and Gallardo (2003), Romero (2003), López and Romero (2004) and Pérez and Gallego (2004).

Another group has considered the efficiency of the Internship and the areas in which this part of the degree program proves lacking in its contribution to the initial training of future teachers. We can cite Hativa (2001), Mayor (2001), Rubia and Torres (2001), Cannon (2002) and Michavilla and Martínez (2002).

Finally, another group of researchers has delved into the topic that is most directly the concern of this paper, namely education students' expectations, perceptions and assessments of their Internships. Among other authors, we can make reference to Toja, González and Carreiro (2001), López (2003), Salvador and Molina (2003), León and Latorre (2004), López and Romero (2004) and Aparicio (2007).

In recent times, internships have taken some substantial steps forward. No longer are students allowed merely to spend a certain period of time at a school, but rather there is a real interest in monitoring students, as well as prior coordination with the teachers guiding the interns for the purposes of planning and assessment.

In order to be an effective internship advisor, the school teacher should take part in the drafting of the internship plan and help determine the conceptual foundation underlying the internship student's training, as well as ensure that the training program is well-structured. This means that the institutions involved share the responsibility for guiding future teachers (Palau and Pañellas, 2012). For this reason, the university should help to facilitate and strengthen the process through coordinated action that should be the fruit detailed planning of the corresponding Internship program so as to avoid the risk of disorganization that stems from the fact that this guidance is carried out by more than just one person and institution.

In the present moment, as this academic year will see the end of the implementation of the new education degree programs, coordination between internship advisors has been reinforced through meetings of

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advising university professors and teacher-advisors from schools, meetings of school coordinators with the university internship coordinator, monitoring reports from students, work plans from the schools, and the assessments from both school-based advisors and university advisors requested by the Education Department of the Catalan government.

For this reason, Internship programs need careful planning, good execution and intensive follow-up and assessment. Just as with any other activity subject to improvement, assessment is especially important in that it represents an opportunity to reflect on the experience and to study it in light of the knowledge that the student has acquired. This is what makes for a learning experience and allows learners to gain advantages from the situations they have faced (Molina, 2004).

For the student, exposure to the reality of a school has a positive impact. Mèrida (2001) reminds us that, for the most part, Internships are highly enriching experiences that broaden educational horizons and allow students to experience new kinds of relationships. However, on occasion these encounters with the real practice of teaching are not always beneficial because students may observe and reproduce professional attitudes and practices that bear little resemblance to a comprehensive educational model (Blanco i Latorre, 2008).

For this reason, we believe it is important to analyze students' perception of the training they receive in the educational centers where they carry out their internships, because in the literature we have consulted assessment of internships is nearly always approached from the point of view of assessing students' progress, but it fails to take into account the contribution of the students themselves, who are the target of the training process.

In addition, the point of view of university professors who serve as academic advisors to interns will complement the students' perspective on the school-based advisors, and the combination of the two perceptions could be a key factor in decisions that may need to be made in the creation and revision of Internship program plans.

Thus, the objectives of this paper are as follows:

- To study the students' degree of satisfaction with the organizational aspects of their internships and with the work environment in their schools.
- To determine students' assessment of the reception they received at the center where they completed their internships, the monitoring of their activities by the teachers and the guidance they received from teachers with respect to the areas in which they should improve their professional conduct.
- To compare the students' assessments with the assessments of the educational centers by the university's academic advisors
- To study the repercussions of the impressions gathered on the future improvement of schools' internship programs and on the design of Internships by the university.

We believe that academic and professional concern for the quality of the practical training of future teachers is reason enough to carry out research and analysis with an eye toward achieving excellence in the training of students, and that for this reason it is a subject worthy of study for those of us who wish to contribute to the quality of degree programs in education.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The focus of the research outlined in this paper was on determining and analyzing the degree of satisfaction among education students with the training they received in schools during their internships, as compared with the assessments of university academic advisors.

The methodology is based on quantitative descriptive research using a survey addressed to students in their second and third years of degrees in Early Childhood Education and Primary Education who are enrolled in Internships. This technique was complemented by a qualitative analysis of the evaluations offered by students in the additional open questions on the survey and through the assessments of the interns' academic advisors at the Facultat de Psicologia, Ciències de l'Educació i de l'Esport Blanquerna (FPCEE Blanquerna) of the Universitat Ramon Llull (URL), who answered another survey. Thus, in accordance with the principle of reflexivity, objectivity is reconsidered as a dialogue between subjectivities, which together can come to a point of view that was lacking when the two were considered separately.

The two techniques allow for the information obtained to be corroborated and validated.

2.1 Participants

For this project, there are two sample groups:

Sample group A is made up of students who have completed the second or third year of degrees in Early Childhood Education and Primary Education at the FPCEE Blanquerna during the 2011-12 academic year. The subjects in this sample group completed survey A, which was conducted on-line. Of all the second and third-year students enrolled in internships, 379 responded to the survey, representing 56% of the population.

Sample group B is made up of 309 professors who served as academic advisors for interns from the FPCEE Blanquerna during the 2011-12 academic year and who were responsible for assessing the schools, and who answered survey B. This survey was completed in writing.

2.2 Measurement Instruments

A survey, addressed to students who have completed the second or third year of their education degree programs. The survey was drafted by the university's Internship Department (Instrument A).

The choices of responses to the survey are arranged according to the Likert Scale, from 1 to 4, with 1 being very little, 2 being a little, 3 being somewhat and 4 being a lot.

There is also a section in which students can complement their quantitative answers with qualitative reflections regarding their assessment of internship training.

Four variables were considered: v1, academic year (second or third); v2, degree program (Early Childhood Education or Primary Education); v3, type of school hosting the internship (private or state-subsidized school, public school or municipal school); and v4, location of the school (Barcelona city or other municipalities of the province of Barcelona).

It should be noted that for second-year students the Internship period is concentrated in the second semester of the school year, while third-year students have two internship periods, one in each semester, for a total of 12 ECTS credits.

Students are placed in centers of their own choosing, and in cases in which multiple students compete for the same position, the student with a better academic record takes precedence.

Each student has a main teacher-advisor at the center at which he or she is carrying out the internship, as well as an academic advisor at the university, who is a professor from the department of Early Childhood Education or Primary Education.

A survey, addressed to professors serving as internship academic advisors to students in education degree programs at the URL. This survey was drafted by the Education Department of the Catalan government. (Instrument B).

The items on this survey, just as those from Instrument A, were to be answered according to the Likert Scale, with the above options.

The variables considered for Instrument B are the same as those for Instrument A.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below, we detail the results of the survey given to students and professors, broken down by item.

Results of the student survey

The results of the student survey are displayed in Table 1.

Items	Percentage score				Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4		
1. Did the organization and working environment help you to successfully complete your internship?	1.8%	5.3%	32.7%	60.2%	3.51	0.684
2. Was the reception you were given satisfactory and did it help you settle into your school and your classroom?	1.3%	6.3%	21.6%	70.7%	3.62	0.666
3. Did the teacher in your classroom appropriately monitor your activities?	2.4%	7.4%	28.5%	61.7%	3.50	0.736
4. Did the teacher in your classroom satisfactorily guide and monitor your learning process?	2.4%	10.6%	28.8%	58.3%	3.43	0.775
5. Did the teacher in your classroom give you regular reports on your performance in the internship and provide guidance on areas with need for improvement?	7.9%	17.2%	31.1%	43.8%	3.11	0.958

Table 1. Results of the student survey

We can see in the table that in the results of the survey answer number 4 received the highest percentage score, over 50% for the first four questions, which is an indication that the students gave high marks overall to the organization of their internships, the reception they received in the schools and the monitoring, guidance and assessment of the teachers there. This point of view is also borne out by the arithmetic mean of the data, which in all cases is above 3. In addition, about a quarter of respondents' scores are accounted for by number 3. This figure tells us that despite the high degree of overall satisfaction, around 25% of the students believe that there are some areas with room for improvement.

In order to analyze whether students have similar points of view regarding the various aspects of the internship training they received from their schools, we have studied the correlations between the scores, which we present in Table 2 below.

Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	-----	0.623	0.540	0.552	0.436
2	-----	-----	0.513	0.525	0.422
3	-----	-----	-----	0.808	0.648
4	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.722
5	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

All correlations are significant to 0,01 (bilateral)

Table 2. Correlations between the items on the student survey

We can see from the results of the correlations in Table 2 that all of the correlations are significant and that they indicate quite a large degree of correlation in that they are at or near the level of 0.5. It is worth highlighting the correlation between students' scores of the monitoring of their activities by the teacher-advisor with the score for guidance and monitoring of the learning process by these teachers, with a figure of 0.808. On the other hand, there is a lower degree of correlation between the assessment of the organization, reception at the center and the work environment and that of the information provided by the teacher-advisor to the student on his or her performance in the internship. This could be an indication of certain differences between the elements that the school in general, and the teacher-advisor in particular, contribute to the Internship.

In Table 3 below we examine the differences between the means for each item related to the training as broken down by the four variables analyzed.

The results for the significance of the differences for the variables with only two groups were determined by choosing the corresponding method: in cases in which there was a normal distribution, the t-test for comparison of means of independent samples was used, and when the distribution was abnormal, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test was used, taking into account the degree of equality of variances,

confirmed using Levenne's F-test. For the type of educational center variable, which had three defined groups, one-factor ANOVA was used, followed by the DMS test for multiple comparisons.

Items	Bilateral significance of the differences in means			
	v1	v2	v3	v4
1. Did the organization and working environment help you to successfully complete your internship?	0.012	0.952	0.241	0.144
2. Was the reception you were given satisfactory and did it help you settle into your school and your classroom?	0.871	0.377	0.658	0.021
3. Did the teacher in your classroom appropriately monitor your activities?	0.038	0.758	0.172	0.135
4. Did the teacher in your classroom satisfactorily guide and monitor your learning process?	0.173	0.607	0.243	0.203
5. Did the teacher in your classroom give you regular reports on your performance in the internship and provide guidance on areas with need for improvement?	<0.001	0.158	0.012	0.016

Table 3. Statistical significance of the differences in means of the items on the student survey, considering the four variables studied

Regarding variable 1, the academic year, we can perceive significant differences for items 1, 3 and 5. Third-year students, who complete a longer internship period than those in their second year, give higher scores to the organization and work environment, the monitoring by the classroom teacher and the assessment and information on areas for need for improvement than do second year students.

With respect to variable 2, the degree program, we don't perceive any significant differences between Early Childhood and Primary Education students in any of the items on the survey.

Nor does the type of educational center influence students' responses, with the exception of item 5, for which the results show that in the opinion of the students teachers from municipal schools did a better job of informing them as to their performance in the internship and the areas they needed to improve than did teachers in state-subsidized, private or public schools, as is apparent from the significant differences in the means. The analysis failed to show significant differences between state-subsidized or private schools and public centers.

The location of the center, in other words whether it is within the city of Barcelona or in another municipality in Barcelona province, does not cause significant differences in students' scores for items 1, 3, and 4. For item 2, we can see that students who complete their internships outside the city of Barcelona give higher scores to the reception they received in the school than those who did their work

within the city. For item 5, the means also display significant differences, in the form of a higher score given by students completing their internships in municipalities outside Barcelona for the item regarding information provided by the classroom teacher on the students' progress and on areas to be improved, with students working inside the city again giving a lower score for this item.

Interns cited both positive and negative assessments of the training they received in the space provided to them on the survey for their additional observations and suggestions. On Table 4 below, we list the positive aspects in descending order of percentage of the students who expressed them, while in Table 5 we list the negative aspects in the same descending order. We include some comments on each of the tables that shed light on some of the elements with the highest percentages.

It should be noted that of the 379 students in the sample, 30.9% cited positive aspects of their internship in general, and the training received from classroom teachers in particular. 7.8% cited negative aspects.

Positive aspects	Percentage of all positive aspects cited	Percentage of subjects in the sample overall
The good reception from the school and the teacher I was treated more as a colleague than as an intern by the teacher in my class and others. They made me feel like a member of the family. They trusted me.	34.2%	10.6%
Satisfactory learning I learned a lot about being a good educator. The teacher was a role model, and the experience was really enriching. Working at a school gives you a chance to learn about all aspects of the teaching profession.	26.5%	8.2%
The support and monitoring of the teacher The teacher gave me help and advice at all times and supported me in my activities.	20.5%	6.3%
Good work environment and good organization of the school At the school there is a good environment and it's well-organized, from the administration to the services. There is an abundance of resources and materials.	6.8%	2.1%
The methodology of the school An active methodology that corresponds to the model we study at the university	6%	1.8%
Good relationship with the teachers	3.4%	1.1%
The response of the children	1.7%	0.5%
The chance to take part in the life of the school	0.9%	0.3%

Table 4. Positive aspects of the internship and of the training from the teacher-advisor

Negative aspects	Percentage of total negative aspects	Percentage of subjects in the sample overall
Lack of dialogue, support and guidance from the teacher-advisor Lack of guidance and dialogue with the teacher. Not enough involvement in monitoring the activities conducted by the intern.	48.3%	3.7%
The methodology of the school Behaviorist, authoritarian and/or traditional methodology Lack of variety in working dynamic.	17.3%	1.3%
Poor reception from the school	10.3%	0.8%
The teacher's assessment was not a reflection of reality	7%	0.5%
Lack of monitoring of classroom work by the center	3.4%	0.3%
The presence of students from other universities in the same classroom	3.4%	0.3%
The coordination of the center failed to respond to the requests of the university	3.4%	0.3%
Poor organization of internships by the center	3.4%	0.3%
The barrier between interns and the rest of the center's staff	3.4%	0.3%

Table 5. Negative aspects of the internship and the training from the teacher-advisor

As is evident from the two tables above and from the total percentages of positive and negative aspects, despite the existence of some problems rate their internships very highly and report that the experience changes their ideas about teaching and schools and allows them to view their future profession as teachers more realistically.

An analysis of the positive comments by internship students shows that the three highest percentages (for a total of 81,2%) refer to the relationship with classroom teacher and the atmosphere of trust that is created in the classroom, which is an influence on the view of the teacher as a role model. In addition, this good relationship, along with the teacher's monitoring and guidance makes the student feel well received. Barquín (2002) also comes to the same conclusions in a paper that highlights that relationships between internship students and teachers are characterized by a mix of trust and respect and vary depending on how much opportunity is given to interns to carry out personal activities and on the limits to their involvement. Furthermore, González Riaño and Hevia Artime (2011) point out that internship advisors at both the school and the university are highly valued by students and are considered to be two

important bases of support throughout the course of the internship, as well as sources of the practical and theoretical foundations necessary to ensure positive results for these internships.

With regard to the negative aspects, we can see that the highest percentage, 48.3% of negative student responses, refers to a poor relationship with the classroom teacher and a feeling of being forgotten and not guided in their learning. The second most common negative answer from students was their observation of a very traditional, unchanging methodology, based chiefly on working with worksheets that were identical for all the children. In addition, some interns reported having problems due to changing teachers during the internship period.

The rest of the answers were given by a very small percentage of participants and were not representative of the overall perceptions of the students.

3.1 Results of the survey of university professors

The results of the survey of university professors are displayed in Table 6.

Items	Percentage score				Mean	Standard deviation
	1	2	3	4		
1. Assistance to students in the development of their work plan	0.7%	2.6%	35.3%	61.4%	3.57	0.581
2. Providing educational and teaching advice to students	0%	4.9%	36.2%	58.9%	3.54	0.589
3. Creation and monitoring of students' strategies of participation in the center	0%	3.2%	37.9%	58.9%	3.56	0.559

Table 6. Results of the university professor survey

The results obtained from the survey of academic advisors display a high degree of uniformity between the three items analyzed. Most of the scores fell in the upper levels, in other words values 3 and 4 on the scale, with these responses making up over 95% of the sample in all cases, an indication that very few professors express a negative assessment of intern training in school and that those who do give negative scores represent isolated cases.

A comparison of the results obtained in this survey and those from the students in Table 1, bearing in mind that the survey questions are not directly comparable, nonetheless shows that the professors' assessments are even higher than those of the students in terms of the assistance, advice and guidance offered by the teachers in the classrooms.

Items	1	2	3
1	-----	0,815	0,828
2	-----	-----	0,770
3	-----	-----	-----

All correlations are significant to 0,01 (bilateral)

Table 7. Correlations between the items of the survey of professors

We can observe a large degree of consistency in the assessments of classroom teachers. This means that when a teacher scores highly, he or she does so in all categories, and the same is true for low-scoring teachers. This is evident from the high degrees of positive correlations between the items in the survey, as seen in Table 7.

Dimensions	Bilateral significance of the differences in means			
	v1	v2	v3	v4
1. Assistance to students in the development of their work plan	0.502	0.152	0.995	0.358
2. Providing educational and teaching advice to students	0.985	0.442	0.405	0.834
3. Creation and monitoring of students' strategies of participation in the center	0.517	0.332	0.180	0.302

Table 8. Statistical significance of the differences in means of the items on the student survey, considering the four variables studied

As to the four variables in the study, we don't observe any significant difference in any of the three items analyzed, a fact that indicates that the differences between groups are minimal, which is to say that the university professors' assessments did not vary by academic year, by degree program, by type of school, nor by the location of the school.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In this study we have confirmed that both internship students and their academic advisors give very high ratings to the teachers who serve as internship advisors in schools, a fact that is apparent in that the average scores for all the items in the study were above 3 on a scale of 1 to 4. These perceptions were also consistently just as positive for all the sub-groups in the study, both of students and teachers, whether the students were in the second or third year of their degrees, whether they were studying Early Childhood Education or Primary Education, whether they worked at a public school or a state-subsidized or private one and whether their work was done at a school within the city of Barcelona or elsewhere in the province. While it is the case that, as indicated in the results section, there were some significant differences between different groups of students in their responses to the survey when broken down by variable, it is also true that none of the groups had a mean score of under 3.

This assessment is important in that it is a reflection of the organization and working environment in schools, the reception of the internship students and the guidance and monitoring of their learning process, all key elements to consider in the context of the relationship between schools and the university and for the purposes of designing a teaching plan for Internship modules.

As part of their training, students especially value regular monitoring from their in-school teacher-advisors, feedback about the activities they perform and the usefulness of these activities and correction of mistakes. They appreciate teachers' interest in students' learning and like being guided through the process. Finally, they place fundamental importance on a good reception at the school and on getting help from teacher-advisors to fit in well with the center and the professional staff.

On the other hand, the chief difficulties arise from the absence of the aspects we have highlighted as being positive. This means a lack of clarity and monitoring of the tasks carried out by students, insufficient time devoted to advising students by school teachers and an inadequate relationship with the teaching staff, causing students to feel that they are not fully a part of the school and thus to be unsatisfied with the treatment they receive.

In many cases, students complain about the organization of the center, the coordination of internships at the school or the assessment they receive from the teacher-advisor.

However, it should be noted that the aspects that students highlight as the most important factors when evaluating their internship training, namely the interest in the student displayed and the assistance given, are associated with the feelings and emotions that arise out of the relationship with the teacher-advisor and the rest of the professional staff of the school. This means that these assessments can sometimes be lacking in objectivity and may obscure the reality of the classroom, the content and subjects taught, classroom management, etc.

University academic advisors are also prone to this type of bias in their assessments of in-school training due to the close relationships that often form between professors and teacher-advisors in schools.

In light of what we have gleaned from the above results, we suggest several areas that could be strengthened:

- Reinforce the links between school-based teacher-advisors and the university, and their shared responsibility for the student's training plan. Therefore, there should be opportunities to come together and truly collaborate on a plan for the work to be done at the school and other related tasks, as well as on the expectations for students' learning. In addition, assessment should be continuous and shared.

- Foster real and relevant reflection on theory and practice and on the balance between the two, placing an emphasis on the professional specialization that can be achieved through Internship programs. The in-school teacher-advisors should be familiar with the internship plan and the competencies it is designed to teach.
- Clarify expectations and the job profile. Students have to be aware of their responsibilities as interns and should be provided with information on their professional environment, the operations of the center, the philosophy of the school, the curricular plan and the methodological approach. This enables students and their teacher-advisors to communicate about issues that are important to the assessment process, bearing in mind the expectations of both the students and the center.
- Promote students' access to faculty meetings in schools, as well as to meetings with families and to other aspects of the life of the school, and gradually allow interns to take more initiative and to have more autonomy to carry out their tasks.
- Promote the assessment of internship training in four areas that can be empirically studied using various measures. The areas should be as follows: reception and involvement of the student in the center, guidance and supervision of the student's educational activities with the children by the teacher-advisor assigned by the school, participation of the student in classroom management and other teaching duties and the scope and transparency of the assessment process.

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