

ACCREDITATION ISSUES FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION
SCIENCE SCHOOLS

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70

Abstract

Purpose: The paper examines the issue of accreditation, types, status and ethical considerations in Library and Information Science, with reference to other professions as a model to adopt.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The paper began by defining the concept of accreditation, objectives and types. It went further to discuss issues and status of accreditation with disciplines in Nigeria, Lessons from other disciplines in connection with their professional standards. It finally enjoined the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) and Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) to borrow a leaf from other developed countries to help ensure standards in the profession.

Findings: from the paper accreditation is said to be a process by which institutions or programmes continuously update their educational standard through evaluation programme and institutional accreditation are the two types we have, some of the objectives of accreditation are: to stimulate and integrate the efforts of institutions to evaluate the standards of education; to strengthen the capabilities of the educational institutions for service to the nation; and to identify educational institutions that meets stated criteria for academic quality. In Nigeria, the National University Commission (NUC) is responsible for the accreditation of Library and Information Science (LIS) Schools, unlike in United Kingdom (UK) United State of America (USA) and Australia where professional bodies are chiefly responsible for the accreditation of LIS Schools. Other professional bodies in Nigeria like Nigeria Institution of Architecture, the Council of Legal Education, the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria and Chartered Accountants of Nigeria participate actively in the accreditation of their professions. It is therefore suggested that NLA and LRCN should live up to their responsibility by participating in the accreditation exercise of LIS Schools, provide parameter for recognition of the degrees and empower librarians and LIS Schools with adequate skills and competence to compete globally.

Practical Implication: The NUC should incorporate NLA and LRCN to implement the stipulated standards for accreditation of LIS Schools.

Originality: Its originality is in the writers' analysis of accreditation issues in LIS Schools in Nigerian Universities, as against what is done in some other countries vis-à-vis other professions NLA, LIS School, NUC and LRCN have much lessons and information to gain from the work.

Keywords: Accreditation, Library, Information Science, Nigeria, Librarians, Registrations Council, Universities.

Paper type: Viewpoint.

Introduction

Accreditation exercises form the total quality assurance mechanisms through which graduates of given disciplines are integrated into the mainstream of professional best practices. Institutions are benchmarked against global standards, thus enhancing the practitioner base and ensuring international relevance of their products. It is an extensive process of external review of institutional programmes with a view to promoting excellence, consistency, relevance, and quality feedback.

The government and professional associations through the instrumentality of accreditation express their academic expectations as defined in the checklist of performance standards for all subject areas. Library and Information Science schools in all civilized countries are subjected to this rigorous review of their curricula and facilities emphasizing commitment to instructional excellence and promotion of environment of professionalism capable of producing a well rounded graduate beyond mere certification.

This chapter therefore, examines the concept of accreditation, global accreditation benchmarks in library and information science, general issues and dynamics of programme accreditation, ethical considerations in accreditation, lessons from other professional bodies like Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigeria Institute of Architects, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), etc. It also discusses the current state of quality control of Library and Information Science schools in Africa, the legal environment of accreditation in Nigeria and the general effect of accreditation on LIS schools.

The chapter concludes that the delivery of academic subjects with strong vocational orientation like Library and Information Science must be subject to some degree of oversight by the professional body. Thus, Nigerian Library Association (NLA), and Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), cannot afford to jettison this awesome role to the National Universities Commission. They should jointly and consistently conduct accreditation of LIS in Nigeria. This is one way of insisting that only quality and credible graduates are recruited into the profession.

Concept of accreditation

Accreditation is a recognition process in which standards, policies and procedures are evaluated to ascertain the quality of a particular programme by accrediting authorities which are either government agencies or specialized/professional bodies. They operate to ensure that students receive an education consistent with standards for entry into practice in their respective fields or disciplines. Accreditation process is an excellent opportunity for schools to look at their programme and take note of progress made as well as gaps to be filled, thus acting as a veritable feedback mechanism.

What is accreditation?

- It is a concept based on self regulation which focuses on evaluation and the continuing improvement of educational quality.

- A process by which institutions or programmes continuously update their educational quality and services through self evaluation and the judgment of peers.
- A status granted to an educational institution or programme which meets commonly accepted standards of quality or excellence.

Objectives of accreditation

There are specific reasons for engaging in accreditation. It is not just an exercise in intimidation and harassment of affected institutions, rather there are overt and latent objectives. Some of these are:

- To stimulate and integrate the efforts of institutions to evaluate the standards of education.
- To strengthen the capabilities of the educational institutions for service to their respective nations.
- To identify educational institutions which meet or exceed stated criteria of academic quality.
- To encourage and assist institutions which have the potential and interest to improve themselves through continuing evaluation and self survey.
- To provide counsel and assistance to established and developing institutions and programmes.
- To provide a basis for institutional relationships, particularly in the transfer of students.
- To provide guidance to students and parents in the choice of institutions and programmes.
- To attract financial aid from government and other sources for accredited programmes and institutions.
- Accredited status contributes to the marketability of a course and graduates. This process helps to expose and eliminate professional quacks.
- It enables professional bodies to gauge their contributions to the growth and development of their professions.
- It ensures that students acquire systematic and coherent body of knowledge as well as requisite practical exposure during the course of their training.
- It forms the primary driver in curriculum development and management.

Types of accreditation

- Broadly speaking, two types of accreditation are identifiable viz; programme and institutional. Programme accreditation refers to the evaluation of academic courses carried out by specialized and professional accrediting bodies to ensure that standards are maintained and that prescribed curriculum as well as

supportive facilities for effective delivery is in place. Institutional accreditation on the other hand focuses on the adequacy and quality of the entire organization rather than isolated courses. There are institutions deficient in many parameters of excellence and are rated high in specific courses. Suffice it to say that most accreditations are programmed in nature especially in developing countries.

International accreditation and certification

- Kigongo-Bukenya (2005) opines that accreditation and certification create a complex quality assurance system known as credentialing. Credentialing refers to the process of self-regulation in which interests in the profession, business or other fields join with one another to exercise controls for the betterment of society at large (Jacobs, 1992). Credentialing focused on an institution or programmes is accreditation, and that which focuses on individuals and seeks to license them as practitioners is called certification. Both accreditation and certification are essentially complementary, providing a quality control assurance for those entering the profession and continued competence through programmes of professional development and certification. International accreditation can be construed as quality control measures agreed and put in place and involved in the education, training and practice among LIS institutions and professionals of nations of the world. This concept has been referred severally as international parity, reciprocity of qualification, recognition of overseas qualifications, equivalence of LIS qualifications or for that matter LIS international education. The reasons for international accreditation lie in the facts that;
- Many common problems are seen and solvable only by nations working together
- Extinction is a real possibility unless new ways are found to increase cooperation and world orderliness
- International LIS cooperation is imperative to ensure humanitarian information provision which consists of granting all people access to a wide variety of information through advancement of knowledge
- Standardization of education and practices would lead to attitude of positive neutrality between national activities.

It is pertinent to point out at this juncture that one big challenge facing international accreditation is the uncompromising attitude of LIS national authorities. They exhibit a high degree of conservatism, that is, the need to hold “our system we have proudly developed over a long time”. This is made by the attitude of chauvinistic superiority; the attitude that something different from another country is necessarily inferior. At any rate, there is urgent need to bury our differences to forge ahead in this fast globalizing world. The need to facilitate consideration of equivalence and reciprocity so that professional exchanges and cooperation may be encouraged worldwide is undoubtedly imperative. It is the utmost benefit of all information professionals to break this wall of partition from differential values in qualification without prejudice to practices in developing countries.

The professional accreditation of LIS is much more pronounced in the UK, USA and Australia (Enser and Wood, 1997). In the United Kingdom, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) is a merger of the Library Association (LA) and the Institute of Information Scientists (IIS) is chiefly responsible for the accreditation of LIS. CILIP has an accreditation instrument which enables peer reviewers to assess a course in terms of current and developing practice in library and information science, and the fostering of appropriate knowledge and skills for entry into the information profession. This instrument incorporates a course checklist that identifies five (5) subject divisions:

- **Information generation, communication and utilization:** the processes and techniques whereby information resources are created, analyzed, evaluated, moderated and manipulated in order to meet the requirements of defined user population.
- **Information Management and Organizational Context :** the application of techniques for planning, implementing, evaluating, analyzing and development of library and information products and services within the context of the organization's culture, aims and objectives. The impact of information systems on the structures and procedures of organization.
- **Information Systems and Information and Communication Technologies:** the availability and functionality of manual and electronic information systems and information and communications technologies insofar as they apply to the principles and practices of information management. The applications of technologies to identify, analyze, specify, implement and evaluate appropriate systems.
- **Information Environment and Policy:** the dynamics of information flow in society, in and between nations, governments and the information media industries.
- **Management and Transferable Skills:** principles and techniques associated with business and institutional management, together with transferable skills of literacy and numeracy.

CILIP also has a requirement that all students must have appropriate practical experience, either as a prerequisite for admission or as an integrated component of the course in the form of industrial placement. Another requirement is that all students should receive instruction in research methods, and must demonstrate their ability to use these methods through the successful completion of a substantial piece of individual work in the form of a project or dissertation.

In addition to course content, professional accreditation is concerned with the context in which a course is offered. Attention is given to the focus of the host department and the expertise, experience and professional engagement of the staff is evaluated.

In United States, American Library Association (ALA) is responsible for the accreditation of library science education. ALA places more emphasis on qualitative assessment. It adopts a process of continuous evaluation that ensures the condition of accreditation remains and provides a platform that guarantees commitment to educational quality.

Accreditation Issues for Library

74

International Federation of Library Association (IFLA), an umbrella association for the Library and Information Science worldwide provides a global benchmark reflecting best practices both in the librarianship training and practice. IFLA's standards for library schools specify fundamental core subjects which should be mastered first by all students as well as serve as prerequisites for the study of specialized subjects. These core subjects include:

- The role of the library in society as a communication agent
- Principles and methods of bibliography
- Principles and methods of organizing library materials (cataloguing and classification)
- Principles and methods of reference and reader services
- Principles and methods of selecting, acquiring and using print and non-print material
- Principles and methods of library management
- Library history
- Bibliography
- Principles and techniques of conducting research in librarianship
- Principles and methods of library automation
- Principles and methods of documenting and information science
- Principles and methods of planning, constructing and equipping a library

IFLA also advocates that general education or studies outside of librarianship should be a major component of the total education of the Librarians. The standards strongly emphasize continuing education as part of the curriculum to keep practising librarians abreast of their areas of specialization.

Issues and dynamics of accreditation

Accreditation of programmes follow similar patterns all over the world. However, this section draws heavily from the Nigeria context to illustrate typical issues and dynamics of such exercise.

▪ *Coverage of accreditation exercise*

The accreditation exercise covers all undergraduate degree programmes taught in all Nigerian universities. Modalities for accrediting postgraduate programmes are being worked out by the National Universities Commission. However, accreditation for postgraduate programmes in the USA and United Kingdom is adequately covered.

- *Existing academic programmes*

All existing undergraduate degree programmes in all Nigerian universities shall come under the National Universities Commission accreditation exercise.

- *New Universities*

The National Universities Commission shall advise government on the desirability or otherwise of the establishment of new universities after due and thorough consideration of the proposals. The initial accreditation exercise for new universities and new academic programmes shall commence three academic sessions after approval for their establishment has been granted.

- *New Academic Units/Faculties/Colleges/Schools/Departments/Programmes*

The Commission shall consider and approve new academic units, departments and programmes after all the laid down guidelines have been complied with bearing in mind the national interest and manpower needs.

- *Status of Accreditation*

The status of accreditation of an academic programme may be identified at one of the following three levels:

- i) **Full Accreditation:** this is usually granted to any degree or other academic programme that has satisfied the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS). Full accreditation is granted for a period of six (6) academic sessions with a mid-term appraisal after three (3) years. After the six academic sessions, there is normally a re-accreditation visit.
- ii) **Interim Accreditation:** this is granted to any academic programme that has minor deficiencies that must be rectified within a stipulated period. It is granted for a period not more than two (2) academic sessions after which the programme is automatically due for re-visitation.
- iii) **Denied Accreditation:** this applies to any programme that has failed to satisfy the approved Minimum Academic Standard (MAS). Request for re-visitation for the purpose of accreditation must come from the university concerned.

It would be appropriate to stress the implication of denied accreditation at this point. When an academic programme has been denied accreditation status, the NUC informs the Vice-Chancellor of the university concerned in writing stating the reasons for such and prescribe steps to remedy the situation. Thereafter, the university is prohibited from admitting students into such a programme with effect from the next admission exercise. The proprietors are also advised to stop funding the programme. Suffice it also to mention that the general public and relevant bodies like Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Civil Service Commission and other employers as well as Scholarship Boards are usually notified.

▪ *Notification of Universities for Accreditation*

The commission gives at least three (3) months notice to the concerned university of an accreditation visit to the particular programme. A self-study form is usually made available for the University for Completion. Upon receipt of twelve copies of the completed form, an Ad-Hoc Accreditation panel is constituted and communicated to the university concerned and all panel members but without a mention of the institution involved. The visit is normally for a maximum of three (3) working days.

▪ *Criteria for accreditation*

A checklist of performance standards is usually adhered to strictly. This examines such issues as: philosophy and objectives of the programme, adequacy of curriculum, quality and quantity of teaching staff, student admission, retention and graduation requirements, standards of degree examination, financial support, physical facilities and administration of the department. It should be noted however, that each of these criteria are assigned various values which are meticulously examined.

Current situation in Africa

Ocholla and Bothma (2005) report that library and information education and training in Africa is undergoing rapid change with difficult challenges to overcome. According to them, during the past twenty years, the number of library schools has grown in some regions like Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and declined in some such as in South Africa, curriculum review and re-orientation have also been a common feature in most LIS Schools. Increased use and access to ICT for LIS education is evident.

It has been observed also that LIS education in Africa at present does not mainly focus on the training and education of Librarians to work in libraries. Although libraries are reported to be the biggest employers of LIS graduates in Africa. Ocholla (2000, 2005) and Sayman (2000) noted rapid growing career opportunities in the non-library sector or what they termed emerging market. This trend has forced most LIS schools to re-orientate their curricula to the new market, thus widening the knowledge base and skills of their graduates.

It must however be admitted that there are disparities in infrastructure facilities in African LIS schools. Those based in South Africa have better technology infrastructures than in other parts of Africa, and in particular cases, fairly comparable to those in developed countries. This affects standards of training in certain countries. Ononogbo and Falaiye (1992) citing Ita (1986) describe the Nigerian Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) graduates as “rather weak and less imaginative, approaching their duties with little confidence”. Ita continues: “these deficiencies are not inherent in these individuals, but are the direct consequences of the weak educational base upon which their professional training has been grafted”. To stem the tide of feeding the labour market with half-baked professionals, the issue of accreditation must be taken more seriously.

The current practice where library professional associations stand aloof, allowing only government agencies to be responsible in the regulation of LIS programmes leaves much to be desired. A cue needs to be taken from ALA and

CILIP in their thorough and total involvement in the certification and accreditation of information professionals and training schools. In Nigeria, it is only the National Universities Commission (NUC) that approves or disallows library and information programmes that fail to conform to the recommended minimum standards. Nigeria Library Association has not been known to insist that certain library schools of very poor standard must not operate; neither has it prescribed minimum benchmarks for the education of its members. It is never on record that LIS programmes were suspended or schools disqualified on account of the activities of this professional association. Its activities should go beyond Annual General Meetings and Conferences, to important issues as accreditation and certification.

Ethical considerations in LIS accreditation

The moral rectitude and value system that surrounds accreditation determines the validity and global acceptance of such reports. It behooves both accrediting agents and institutions concerned to preserve the sacred and sanctity of the ideals which the exercise represents. Such ethical considerations include and not limited to:

- **Honesty:** the situation where institutions engage in massive window-dressing to impress the accreditors is not only misleading but outright misrepresentation. This kind of dishonest practices range from hiring personnels on contract for accreditation purpose, borrowing books and other equipment and return as soon as the exercise is over, creating fictitious records and files, etc. It is only when institutions are transparent that accreditation reports will reflect the true state of affairs.
- **Integrity:** visiting panel members must be above board in their dealings with the institutions. They must stick to principles even in the face of pressure. There is this belief that everybody has a price-tag and must be negotiated. It is really about preserving the future of higher education. The joy of advancing the education and development of posterity should be priced above personal gains and aggrandizement.
- **Objectivity:** panelists must conduct the review in a way that places them above prejudices, biases, self-interest, religious inclination and ethnic preferences. Assessments have to be fair, transparent and consistent with the checklist. Pre-conceived notions should be jettisoned while facts are celebrated, enthroned and properly reported.
- **Mutuality:** any genuine and worthwhile accreditation seeks ways to make constructive contributions that advance the current practices in the department or programme concerned. The university management must be unnecessarily defensive, but be willing to learn and benefit from the experience of external colleagues. This type of mutuality provides a most conducive atmosphere for effective accreditation.

Professional accreditation: Lessons from other disciplines

Apart from the statutory accreditation of programmes by National Universities Commission (NUC), professions like Architecture, Medicine, Law,

and Accounting are subjected to more stringent accreditation by their professional associations.

Architects in Nigeria are required to have passed the Professional Practice Examination (PPE) after completing a degree programme from schools that have been accredited by the Nigeria Institute of Architecture (NIA) in addition to a two-year minimum internship programme as prerequisite for licensure. A masters degree from a fully accredited school with the mandatory two-year internship duly approved by the NIA allows a candidate to automatically attempt the PPE. Candidates with other levels of degree at the time of graduation would, however, be required to pass preparatory examinations before attempting the PPE (e.g. Higher National Diploma or B.Sc from fully accredited schools or a masters degree from a non-accredited school}. The NIA conducts periodic accreditation exercises at the schools to ensure that the quality of the degree programmes prepare their graduates for professional practice.

The Council of Legal Education is the supervisory body responsible for the accreditation, control and management of legal education in Nigeria. The Council is in charge of the Nigerian law school. Persons wishing to study law in Nigeria must first undergo undergraduate training in Nigerian universities for the award of an LL.B degree after which they proceed to the Nigerian law school for practical training. The council also recognizes some foreign degree holders from accredited overseas institutions for purposes of admission.

The Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria as well as the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria follow the typical example of the two professional associations earlier discussed in their comprehensive and detailed accreditations of both programmes and Practitioners. These professional bodies dictate the maximum number of admissions to a given programme domiciled in a specific university. NIA insists that students' population in a particular level should not exceed 40-45 and staff-student ratio of 1:10. It is also mandatory that not more than 8 to 10 medical students are around a teacher for practicals. Certain textbooks, journals and equipment are highly compulsory to attract professional accreditation. It is also of paramount importance to note the fact that these professional bodies ensure high ethical standards for their members in the performance of their assignments. Erring members are disciplined and at times, licences withdrawn in the event of very severe cases. This instills a deep sense of propriety and decorum in all professional conducts and practice.

What lessons for LIS Accreditation

Nigeria Library Association and Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria should re-strategize and take cue from their United States and United Kingdom counterparts, ALA, CILIP and other professional bodies that are determined to making continuous input to the development and growth of their relevant programmes. It is too dangerous to abdicate the quality control function of library and information science to the NUC.

There is the dire need of auditing all LIS programmes in the country with a view to having a baseline and accurate database of all such existing disciplines in Nigerian universities.

As the professional bodies responsible for LIS in Nigeria, NLA in conjunction with LRCN have a duty to provide an elaborate checklist prescribing minimum standard for an ideal library school capable of producing brightest graduates. Such minimum standards should include: computer laboratory with internet facilities, three different library management softwares, modern departmental library, quality of staff coefficient, staff-student ratio, uniform admission requirement, adequate classroom, audio-visual laboratory, well defined curriculum that meets international standard etc.

With regards to enforcement of these standards, LRCN should engage in periodic accreditation of the various programmes. It needs to constitute a visitation council responsible for preliminary review and education of the operators of the minimum standards and ensuring compliance. Upon their report, LRCN accreditation panel will visit the institutions for approval or denial of the programmes. There is also the need to embark on massive publication of LRCN approved universities and to warn employers to be wary of quacks.

The current practice of conferment of Chartered Librarians by mere verification of certificates is a mockery of licensure. Qualifying examinations should be conducted testing rare blend of theory, practice and ICT proficiency. It is only those who excel in this regard that would be conferred 'Chartered Librarians', this will attract respect, credibility, prestige and nobility to the profession. Chartership earned through hard work, mastery and display of excellent competences would be more valuable and treasured.

The annual dues hitherto paid to NLA should be termed annual licence fee. Defaulting librarians or those who fail to remit their fees as and when due would have their licences revoked for the period under consideration and be precluded from practicing as librarians in any organization. However, the enumerated activities would require appropriate legislations to thrive. NLA must therefore, pursue vigorously amendment and/or passage of enabling laws to put the profession on a higher pedestal.

Legal environment of LIS accreditation in Nigeria

The legal basis for accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian Universities is derived from Decree No. 16 of 1985. Section 10 of the Decree as amended and incorporated in Section 4(m) of the National Universities Commission Amendment Decree No.49 of 1988 empowers the Commission to "lay down minimum standards for all universities in the Federation and to accredit their degrees and other academic awards after obtaining prior approval through the Minister from the President" provided that the accreditation shall be in accordance with such guidelines as may be laid down and approved by the Commission from time to time.

In pursuance of this action, the NUC appointed panels (approved by the Honourable Minister) to produce draft proposals on minimum academic standards for all undergraduate academic programmes in all the Nigerian Universities. The work of the panels resulted in the ultimate approval of minimum academic standards for all Nigerian Universities in such areas as the arts and humanities, education and social sciences, science and technology, agriculture, human and veterinary medicine etc. In the approved documents, the library and information science falls within the Faculty of Education for all universities.

National Universities Commission remains the only legal framework for accreditation of LIS in Nigeria. Decree No.12 of 1995 empowers the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria to determine and regulate the practice of librarianship in Nigeria. This body for now has not been involved practically in the accreditation of LIS programmes. However, it is expected to lobby for and procure necessary legislative mechanisms as well as galvanize all its professional resources to complement NUC in this indispensable but onerous task.

Impact of accreditation on LIS schools

National Universities Commission has done tremendously well through its accreditation exercises to ensure that quality and sufficient number of staff teach in our library schools. It also prescribes course contents and delivery modes comparable with the best in the world. Departments of Library and Information Science are as it were, compelled to continuously upgrade and maintain specified standards to avoid denial accreditation and the concomitant effect of its negative publicity.

The exercise provides a reasonable basis for international recognition of LIS degrees from Nigeria. The uncompromising stance of NUC and zero percent tolerance to low standards is reassuring to the external communities in their bid to engage professionals from our library schools. It is a guarantee for solid career foundation for future generations of information professionals. Strict adherence to the minimum standards empowers LIS graduates with requisite skills and core competencies that enhance competitive advantage.

Accreditation fosters a tradition of excellence among LIS schools. Beyond the issue of quality control in terms of course content and delivery, emphasis is usually placed on physical facilities with the aim of creating most enabling and empowering environment to tease out the full potentials of the students.

There is a symbiotic relationship, though imperceptible, that exists between accreditation generally and LIS schools. The quality of library services including the sophistication and caliber of librarians form vital basis for favourable accreditation of programmes. This measure tacitly increases the demand for librarians as well as academic libraries. It creates opportunity for LIS graduates to give expression to their training and skills. Accreditation also measures the external efficiency rating of the LIS schools. During the exercise, panels demand for a displayed evidence of employers' satisfaction, that graduates of the programme are performing well at their various levels of employment. Where a university has not graduated any student from the programme to be accredited, employers' rating of the students' course practical work may be assessed by panel members in lieu of employers' rating of graduates. This interaction between the department and industry necessitated by accreditation provides a further impetus for relevance.

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**Accreditation
Issues for
Library**

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82

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