Teaching approach for indigenous people: an empirical study from Pahang, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the approach in teaching practice to *muallaf* (Muslim indigenous people: *orang asli*) and the factors of attraction toward the acceptance of Islamic understanding among them. The study was conducted at the village of *muallaf orang asli* at Paya Sendayan, Temerloh Pahang, Malaysia. Design of this study are using the qualitative methods. Data were collected by observation and selected informant interviews based on purposive sampling methods. Data were analysed using the thematic methods. The results of the study found that the approach in teaching practice to *muallaf orang asli* is *syarah* (explanation) and discussion presented through storytelling, stimulation method and *talaqqi musyafahah* (face to face). Meanwhile, the results of the attraction factors toward the acceptance of teaching and learning among *muallaf orang asli* are aspect of reward, facilities, understanding and skills of teachers or educators for the socio-culture and role model shown by teachers or educators as well as the Muslim community nearby the living community. The findings of this study show that the teaching and learning of *muallaf orang asli* should be organized systematically in line with the factors of attraction in order to increase interest and earnestly.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The *muallaf* (Muslim convert) group is the group that has just embraced Islam. It is explained that muallaf is a group that has embraced Islam but is still lacking in understanding and appreciation of Islam [1]. Accordingly, the implementation of education for the muallaf group of people is very important in ensuring the acceptance of Islamic understanding that is effective and suitable for their situation. With this regard, religious education and guidance are also very necessary for a convert to move from formal conversion to practical conversion [2]. The purpose of education in a Muslim is to know God, do good deeds for the hereafter, be able to fulfill God's rights and educate people for their worldly life [3]. This shows that education for the indigenous converts is very important so that the purpose a Muslim can be fulfilled from the aspects of the world and the hereafter. The question is, in educating the *muallaf orang asli*, what is the approach in the teaching and learning practices for them? What are the factors that attract teaching and learning to them? This article will discuss about that matter. The research problem of this study is the implementation of studies for the muallaf group is a very important matter so that they can understand the teachings of Islam well. Systematic and organized teaching and education practices can help attract their

attention to understand and implement Islamic practices. However, the implementation of teaching and learning for the *muallaf orang asli* is still less effective and disorganized. The clear indication is that the lack of complete curriculum causes the delivery to not be delivered well [4]. Modules that are too general have also caused instructors to find that there is no suitable method to teach existing modules to converts. Moreover, the inaccuracy of the delivery method caused the message to be poorly understood [5]. At this point of view, the mastery of teachers among preachers about the method of delivering Islam is still at a minimal level [6]. Aspects that are not a priority have been given to the muallaf group and are burdensome. The ability of teachers among preachers to accommodate between *fiqh al-syar'i* (mastery or understanding from the point of knowledge) and *fiqh al-waqi* (mastery or understanding of reality) is also a question that becomes an issue in the context of the approach and process delivery of preaching effectively. As such, conventional teaching methods for converts are seen to still lack the effect of a good understanding of Islam [7].

Muallaf orang asli are made up of various ethnic backgrounds, ages and different cultural customs. It requires a method that is interesting and easy to understand. Failure to plan and organize education for converts may cause them to be neglected, want to apostatize or leave Islam entirely [8]. The other study Selvanathan *et al.* [9] found that there are still no specific methods and guidelines for instructors to use for converts or *orang asli*, causing learning and teaching methods to be left entirely to instructors. Teaching and learning delivered more using own methods. The further study Wahab *et al.* [10] stated that there are still some converts who have embraced Islam who are still unable to recite *Al-Fatihah*. Moreover, the study Shah *et al.* [11] stated that the delivery approach should be based on a solid understanding covering tendencies in thinking, status and knowledge as well as appreciating Islamic teachings as a way of life. For this purpose, the approach in teaching and learning practices needs to be clearer from time to time by taking into account the level of thinking and the appropriateness of the place.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Islamic teaching and learning practice

Teaching and learning on understanding Islam are a very important aspect for converts. It aims to guide and educate a person to be able to understand the teachings of Islam in the aspects of faith, worship and morals. This process involves the development of knowledge that is guided by the Quran and Sunnah. Abdullah [12] stated that education in Islam is based on the concept of *al-din* (religion), the concept of *insan* (man), the concept of *'ilm* and *ma'rifah* (knowledge), the concept of *hikmah* (wisdom), the concept of adil (justice), the concept of charity as manners and the concept of kuliyyah-jami *'ah* (university).

The development of the education of *muallaf orang asli* is seen with the establishment of several study centers under the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For example, study classes could be seen under the management of the state religious departments under the official authority [13]. Among the teaching and learning practices implemented in the study of Islamic knowledge is using traditional methods by conveying the contents of the Quran and hadith [14]. Traditional methods commonly used are lectures or explanations, centered on printed materials, repeating messages, focusing on memorization, question and answer, delivering according to the situation and level of understanding. It is still relevant especially in the teaching and learning of converts [15] and [16].The storytelling teaching method is easier to convey or accept to the general public or people of all ages because it is relaxed and less formal. Al-Quran has mentioned the storytelling method (storytelling teaching) which is one of the storytelling techniques, 'We tell you (O Muhammad) a story as beautiful as the way We revealed to you this Al-Quran, when in fact you, before the revelation came, were from people who never realized it' (Q.S. Yusuf 12:3).

Based on this verse, Empidi and Emang [17] stated that the *asbab al-nuzul* (reason for the descent) of this verse is as narrated by Ibn Jarir who stated that the companions felt bored and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, tell us a story.' Allah sent down the verse: 'Allah has sent down the best words' (Q.S. Al-Zumar, 23). Then they felt bored again and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, tell us a story other than the laws of the Quran. Allah revealed the verse: Alif Lam Ra. These are the clear verses of the book (Quran) (from Allah). Verily, we sent it down in the form of Al-Quran in Arabic so that you can understand it. We tell you the best story (Q.S. Yusuf, 1-3).

This shows that the prophet s.a.w (peace be upon him) used the method of telling stories to his companions in explaining the teachings of Islam. In this context, the storytelling method is a greeting, a form of persuasive communication that is easy to convey [18], can be understood and accepted by all groups of people [19] especially messages that related to faith. In addition, the question-and-answer method is a two-way interaction involving students and teachers that has a positive effect on students' understanding of the topic or lesson learned because they have the opportunity to question the teacher for further clarification on the subject. According to Anwar and Khozin [20], Rasulullah s.a.w used the method of narrating in

questioning, waiting for the answer of revelation, giving guidance and tolerant with companions. The study Latif *et al*. [21] explained many events that happened between the prophet s.a.w using the question-and-answer technique to encourage the companions to be sensitive, think and understand what he said [22]. In the context of *muallaf orang asli*, according to McIvor [23], teaching and learning practices should follow the level of thinking compared to the educated community. The other study by Handayani *et al*. [24] also stated that the question-and-answer method in topics related to faith requires skill and appropriateness of the level of thinking of the indigenous people.

In addition, teaching and learning practices have a close relationship to aspects of attraction that arise based on the elements or symptoms found in the human body itself. The study by Huda *et al*. [25] stated that aspects of attraction emerge from external and internal factors such as size, different, something new, repetition, movement, and desire. In the context of teaching and learning, the further analysis of study by Huda *et al*. [26] explained that attraction factors are influenced by five aspects, namely attitude, ability to understand teaching, perseverance, opportunity and quality of instruction. If a person has a high motivation attitude, it is easy to understand the teaching, more diligent and effective. In particular, the other study [27] stated four influencing factors, namely quality of instruction, appropriate level of instruction, incentive and time.

In addition, past studies related to the teaching and learning of converts have linked physical, material and spiritual aspects as factors of attraction. The particular attention of the study by Huda *et al*. [28] stated that the language is good, gentle and appropriate to the situation of the *mad'u* (target group) such as in sermons, study classes, lectures, discussions, conveying amar makruf nahi mungkar and writing. The further study by Hashim [29] stated that it must be humane, placing one thing as the most important of the other main things including *awlawiyyat* (giving priority) with the simple connecting to the beauty of the Quran covering pronunciation, language and meaning to affect the heart target groups. The other study by Nawi [30] stated that it must be based on *ḥikmah* (proper situation) and *maw'iẓah al-hasanah* (best example) in order to strengthen the elements of *quwwah* (authority). The additional study by Syofiarti *et al*. [31] stated by explaining what is known about Islam, making Islam easy to practice, persuading, using rationality for contemplation, *tarhib* (rewarding system) and *qudwah hasanah* (role model). As such, the other study by Zainul *et al.* [32] found that the factors of attraction are the elements of continuity, differences, similarities, repetition and virtue.

In the context of the *muallaf orang asli*, the community element for social services method is also related to the attraction factor in the teaching and learning to them. The study of Saifullah *et al.* [33] found the implementation of informal teaching to the *muallaf orang asli* through the organization of community programs such as feasts, pilgrimages from house to house, sports, and mutual aid. In addition, the study of Merriam [34] found that one of the attractive factors affecting the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the *orang asli* community is building a good relationship by courting through social and religious aspects. This study also found that the *muallaf orang asli* tend to accept instructors or educators who have three main characteristics, which are knowledgeable, moral and skilled. However, in a study by Hussain [35] it was found that the factors of the period of conversion to Islam, the level of education and the background of the mother tongue need to be taken into account in the process of teaching and learning for converts so that it has a positive effect on understanding and appreciation.

2.2. Muslim converts in the State of Pahang

The state of Pahang is also inhabited by the three main tribes of the *orang asli* community, namely the Negrito, Senoi and Malay-Proto. The Negritos are divided into six tribes namely Kensiu, Kintak, Lanoh, Jahai, Mendriq and Bateq. The Senoi people inhabit the slopes of Titiwangsa, which is in the interior of the states of Perak, Kelantan and Pahang. There are six tribes in the Senoi group, namely Che Wong, Mahmeri, Jahut, Semoq Beri, Semai and Temiar. The Proto-Malays live next door to the Malays in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor. Their customs and culture can be said to have certain similarities with the Malays. Most of their villages are now located within Kuala, Kanaq, Seletar, Jakun, Semelai and Temuan (*orang asli*) Development Department [36].

The *muallaf orang asli* has always been given focus in the progress process by the government since independence. Various educational development programs have been prepared to improve the socio-cultural and economic achievements of the *muallaf orang asli* such as facility infrastructure, settlement, health and education. However, in terms of education, it is still lagging behind. Past researchers such as Nurdani *et al*. [37], and Berlian and Huda [38] stated that among the factors that have an impact on education lag are poverty, communication, attitude, prejudice, and physicality in teaching and learning at school [39]. In that time, the government is committed to developing the indigenous community until today. Continuous efforts have shown some good achievements of the *muallaf orang asli* in the current current development.

In the context of Islamization, many in the *muallaf orang asli* in the state of Pahang have embraced Islam since the 1970s. This effort has been implemented by the Pahang State Department of Islamic Religion,

the Pahang State Department of Indigenous Affairs, the Pahang State Islamic Welfare Organization, and the Development of Indigenous Civilization [40].

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative design. Data was collected using observation and interview methods. The respondents consist of the *muallaf orang asli* of the Smoq Beri and Jahut tribes who live in a group in the *orang asli* village of Kampung Paya Sendayan. The respondents of the study consisted of *orang asli* religious teachers and *muallaf orang asli* who were selected based on the purposive sampling method. The selection of respondents meets the characteristics that have been set as the objectives of the study.

According to the study of Sahudin *et al.* [41], the sampling procedure is carried out with the researcher setting certain characteristics to be selected as study respondents. This method thus excludes elements in the population who do not have the desired characteristics from being selected to be respondents. The use of this sampling procedure is said to be able to improve the quality of information required by the study. The *muallaf orang asli* religious instructors consist of the orang asli mobilizers appointed by the Malaysian Islamic Development Department and the Dakwah Brigade, Pahang Islamic Religious Department. While the Aboriginal respondents consist of converts who have converted to Islam and followed religious studies after converting to Islam as shown in Table 1.

This study was conducted in the *muallaf orang asli* village of Paya Sendayan, Temerloh, Pahang state. This area was chosen as the study location because it has a group of indigenous converts who are following the process of religious education after conversion to Islam. According to Ramle and Huda [42], qualitative research is suitable for use because it involves limitations in terms of scope, time, study participants and study place in order to obtain in-depth and comprehensive results. In addition, qualitative research can record and record information provided by research participants, which becomes an important reference source for interpreting a matter that was previously considered complicated and difficult.

Observational data has been collected through several religious teaching and learning sessions involving children, adults and the elderly. Observations were conducted to see the implementation of religious teaching and learning among the indigenous converts. It also helps to identify factors that attract respondents to study. While the interview data was conducted as an in-depth interview. Semi structured procedure used in this interview so that the respondents (R1-R7) can provide feedback with the suitability of the topic. Before the interview process was conducted, respondents agreed to be interviewed with a recording device. Recordings were transcribed for description and analysis. The interview data was analyzed using the thematic method.

Table 1. Research participants

No.	Research participant	Sex	Age	Occupation
1.	Respondent 1 (R1)	Male	68	Educator
2.	Respondent 2 (R2)	Male	40	Educator
3.	Respondent 3 (R3)	Female	40	Muallaf indigenous people
4.	Respondent 4 (R4)	Female	32	Muallaf indigenous people
5.	Respondent 5 (R5)	Male	18	Muallaf Indigenous people
6.	Respondent 6 (R6)	Male	20	Muallaf indigenous people
7.	Respondent 7 (R7)	Female	39	Muallaf indigenous people

4. RESULTS OF STUDY AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Teaching practices for indigenous converts

The results of the study found that the teaching practice for *muallaf orang asli* is the method of syarah (explanation), discussion and question and answer. The *syarah* (descriptive method) is used to explain a topic in terms of faith, worship and morals. For example, in explaining the existence of God, the instructor will explain by logically relating God's creations that are found around the lives of *muallaf orang asli*. They often interact with nature for the purpose of living and earning sustenance. However, the lecture method is not carried out in a formal and one-way manner that is teacher-centered. It is presented in a more relaxed form of storytelling and opens up a space for questions and discussion. This method is always used to identify *muallaf orang asli* who do not feel too formal. Usually, among the topics that open up questions and discussions are issues related to prayer, fasting *zakat, halal,* and *haram* and so on.

> "*...it really has to be explained by the way of telling stories close to them. It does tell the right things and there is a backup, so as not to run away. Sometimes we also have funny elements so as not to get bored*" (Respondents 1 and 2).

The lecture and discussion method are delivered in a storytelling manner with the teacher as the center and according to the circumstances and ability of the *muallaf orang asli*. It is a blended method that combines the delivery of lectures and discussions in the form of narration to increase the attitude of the *muallaf orang asli*'s interest in learning. It coincides with the study of Zainuri and Huda [43], who explained that the lecture method that was often practiced before was changed to the latest method so that the teacher's teaching pattern becomes more interesting and effective and the emphasis follows the situation.

> "*Various books I use and I go to courses related to the teaching of the orang asli community if there is a program organized. Apart from that, it is an aspect of faith, worship and morals. This method is important to strengthen the basic needs of the faith of every Muslim.*" (Respondent 1)

This study also found that teaching methods in the form of simulations are used to show the way in practical topics such as prayer, tayammum, and funeral management and so on.

> "*The learning taught is very good and beneficial in my life as a Muslim. I enjoy studying with Ustaz Che Atun.*" (Respondent 3).

This method is easier to understand when the *muallaf orang asli* sees how to practice prayer correctly in the pillars of action. It is very important to show the real ways to do a worship practice.

> "*We look and we try to do it. Easy to follow the pace in learning and get real experience. This is easy for me to pray after studying.*" (Respondents 3 and 4)

This simulation method is very important to show the real ways of doing a worship practice. Listening, seeing and finally doing practice is the best method to make it easier for the native converts to understand more deeply about the teaching. Practical matters need to be practiced regularly so that the Aboriginal converts can more easily understand and implement the worship and become a practice in daily life.

In addition, the *talaqqi musyafahah* (face to face) which is used face-to-face between the teacher and the *muallaf orang asli* was being the one of the instruction approaches. The instructor will hold a meeting to teach recitation of the Quran. If it cannot be done face-to-face, the instructor will use the online method by using applications such as whatapps video call. But it depends on the internet coverage. For example, the *talaqqi musyafahah* method is used in learning to read the Quran, especially in prayer.

> "*When teaching how to pronounce surah Al-Fatihah, then the pronunciation must be observed so that the pronunciation becomes correct over time. I always check the readings. Even though it's a plate, we have to try to do better*" (Respondents 1 and 2)

At the same time, the findings of the study found that the practice of teaching with the help of books or modules is very significant in helping teachers or educators to explain Islamic teachings to *muallaf orang asli*. This can be seen based on interviews with informants about the main things in getting to know Islam more easily. The syllabus of *aqidah* (belief), *sharia* (Islamic law) and akhlak (morality) is used so that the *muallaf orang asli* can understand it perfectly. This is because the *muallaf orang asli* is difficult to understand easily. the *muallaf orang asli* of converts really needs guidance and complete learning methods to help in a better direction.

4.2. Factors of attraction towards the accepatance of teaching practices among the community of *muallaf orang asli*

The subsequent factor in the way to look into detail about the acceptance of teaching practices among the *muallaf orang asli* is on the attraction phase. The particular attention is governed in continuing the acceptance of teaching practices among them in order to take the beneficial impact on improvement process and pathway. Moreover, the important aspects in the way to transform the wide range of various factors such as cultural, religious, and socio-economic aspects could play a role in helping to shape their attraction on teaching improvement. On this view, the results of the study found factors of attraction towards the acceptance of teaching and learning based on codes and themes in Table 2. This data was collected from the process of observation and interviews with respondents consisting of instructors and native converts.

Table 2. Codes and themes of attraction factors

Statement	Theme
Doing good	Reward
Provide learning facilities	
Provide materials and can focus	
Surau and hall	Facilities
Comfort and orderliness	
Care of the place (maintenance) so that the place does not suffer frequent damage	
Language	Socio-cultural
Understand timing	
Custom	
Forbidden for something	
Belief in the life and environment of the forest	
How to communicate	
Facial and body language	
Likes good people	Role model
Worried about outsiders	
Have their own cultural customs	

4.2.1. Help and rewards

The aid aspect is one of the attractive factors for the *muallaf orang asli*, especially in encouraging learning. Forms of aid that are often received by the indigenous community such as houses, water and electricity facilities, roads, food, clothing, and school equipment. The forms of assistance provided will have a good effect on the Aboriginal converts to be competitive and understand their responsibilities as converts better.

In addition, among the teaching methods that are always carried out to the *muallaf orang asli* is reward. Usually, the instructor will provide food and drinks for free using their own resources. Orang asli converts will be more interested in attending religious classes if food and drinks are provided. This is because Orang Asli converts can take advantage of the time attending religious classes and do not have to cook again when they return home (Respondent 3, 4, 5 and 6).

> "*I do give them food and drink when class starts. This is because to attract people's attention to learn. If not, it will be difficult for them to attend class. So, I like to bring food while teaching*" (Respondent 1).

4.2.2. Facilities

The aspect of facilities in teaching and learning is one of the factors that attract *muallaf orang asli*. The comfort of a study place such as a surau or hall can attract the interest of native converts to attend religious classes. This is because most *muallaf orang asli* villages only use the surau or hall as the main place of learning (interview respondents 1 and 2). There are several suraus in the villages of indigenous converts in other states that are equipped with air conditioning, spacious study rooms, sufficient chairs and tables. The comfort of this place and teaching space can indirectly attract the interest of *muallaf orang asli* to attend religious classes or programs in their villages.

In addition, there are also learning materials such as books and stationery provided to the *muallaf orang asli* community. In fact, some orang asli mobilizers are willing to spend their own pocket money to provide the learning materials in order to attract the interest of the native converts to attend religious studies classes. The perfect learning and teaching facilities provided in the locality of the residential environment make this *muallaf orang asli* community interested in following learning consistently.

> "*Most facilities are not available in muallaf orang asli village. So, the convert community is weak in self-management. So, I think complete facilities can make teaching and learning more meaningful and used in life.*" (Respondent 2)

4.3. The need to understand the socio-cultural structure of *muallaf orang asli*

The results of the study found that one of the factors that attract *muallaf orang asli* to teaching and learning is the need for teaching groups or educators to understand the socio-culture of the orang asli community. Although the indigenous community lives close to the Muslim Malay community and often interacts with Malay-Muslim instructors or teachers, they still lack influence especially in teaching and learning. The study of Adil and Huda [44] shows that most of the Asli people do not fully interact socially in

mainstream Malaysia which is dominated by the Malay community. This gap makes it difficult for teachers or educators to realize an effective teaching and learning process. A study of Arifin *et al.* [45] found that the orang asli of the Jahut tribe in Pahang have unique beliefs, customs, language, medicine and taboos. The language spoken is known as the Jahut language and is part of the Mon-Khmer language, which is a branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. The orang asli in the State of Pahang have a variety of communication languages that vary by tribe.

In this regard, the group of instructors or educators must have knowledge about the socio-culture of the orang asli tribe in the State of Pahang which is still synonymous with the living environment against the backdrop of the forest economy and demography in the interior. These environmental and cultural factors also affect the lifestyle of the *muallaf orang asli* community. The findings of this study also show the importance of understanding or introducing the terms that are commonly spoken by the *muallaf orang asli* people, which is an attractive factor in teaching and learning that affects the interest of the *muallaf orang asli* translators. The findings of this study coincide with the study of Ropei *et al.* [46] who found a lack of teachers or religious educators who can speak the language of the *muallaf orang asli* tribe. The results of the interview (Respondents 1 and 2), stated that they will try to use the terms in the local indigenous language in order to understand the message.

> "*Communication is a problem for orang asli converts. Sometimes we insert terms in the original language. Some young people are happy to understand the Malay language. But parents are hard. So only their children can understand the language spoken by outsiders.*" (Respondents 1 and 2)

It is a communication requirement with the *muallaf orang asli* community. Respondent 2 also admitted that the difficulty in understanding caused the *muallaf orang asli* to lack interest and not care about learning. This situation requires the teacher or educator to master the basic things in the language and culture of the *muallaf orang asli* people.

> "*I myself admit that I am still learning how to interact with them easily. This is why they sometimes have difficulty understanding the Malay language. So, we have to learn a little bit of their language so that they like to study with us.*" (Respondent 2)

Examples of *qudwah* (role model) are manifestations of moral appreciation from words and actions accompanied by sincerity [47]. Although it is intended to convey knowledge, it affects the interest of *muallaf orang asli* to study religion with teachers or educators who have noble morals. On this view, the essence of having the trust as strategic role in building organizational sustainability could be enhanced through the inclusive-based communication [48]. With this regard, the critical exposure on monitoring the progress to manage the proper practices on playing role of model would give insights into instruction design [49]. As a result, both instructer and teacher should set a good moral example in translating the social responbility into the circumstance [50]. In particular, such arrangement is considered to contribute in giving the clear detail into a follower for the *muallaf orang asli* either directly or indirectly. This is because the *muallaf orang asli* community sees how teachers interact with them. Among them are patience, speaking the truth, cleanliness, gentleness, helping each other, always building good relationships, not causing conflict, communicating well, always visiting and saying hello (interview Respondents 2 and 3). At the same time, *muallaf orang asli* also always observe teachers or educators from different ways of dressing, speaking and so on.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be stated that the approach in learning and teaching to the *muallaf orang asli* is very important to build a strong understanding of Islam. The results of the study found that the approach in the teaching and learning of *muallaf orang asli* is the method of *syarah* (open explanation) and discussion delivered in the form of storytelling, the method of stimulation and *talaqqi musyafahah*. At the same time, the results of the study found that the factors that attract *muallaf orang asli* to the acceptance of teaching and learning are the reward aspect, the ease of the facility, the understanding and skills of the instructor or educator to understand them about the socio-culture and the role models shown by the instructor or educators and Muslim communities that are close to the living environment of the *muallaf orang asli* community. The findings of this study show that the teaching and learning of *muallaf orang asli* needs to be organized systematically taking into account the attractive factors that help increase interest and seriousness. It requires the skills and readiness of the instructor or educator in carrying out the teaching and learning process, as well as connecting with informal aspects of education in the form of society indirectly.

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