

Identifying Components for Promoting Mental Health of Teachers in Exceptional Schools of Tehran

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Vashghani Farahani M, Mohammad Davoodi A, Mohammadkhani K, Jamali A. (2024). Identifying Components for Promoting Mental Health of Teachers in Exceptional Schools of Tehran. *Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology*, 7(4), 186-194. <http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijes.7.4.19>



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The objective of this study was to identify the key components necessary for promoting mental health among teachers in exceptional schools in Tehran. This research aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to mental health in this unique educational setting and to provide insights that can inform future interventions and support systems.

Methodology: An exploratory study design employing thematic analysis was used to achieve the research objective. Participants included university faculty members with expertise in mental health, selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and content analysis of relevant documents from scientific databases. The data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach to identify organizing themes and their associated dimensions and components.

Findings: The analysis revealed several key components essential for promoting mental health among teachers in exceptional schools. These included knowledge and awareness, self-efficacy, mind management, quality of life, independence, environmental mastery, moral character, positive feelings, and productivity. Each of these components was found to significantly impact the mental health and well-being of teachers, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and comprehensive training programs.

Conclusion: The study underscores the complexity of mental health among teachers in exceptional schools and the effectiveness of targeted interventions in addressing their unique challenges. By focusing on the identified components, educational systems can create supportive environments that foster both teacher and student well-being. The findings provide a foundation for developing comprehensive mental health programs and highlight the importance of ongoing research and collaboration to support teachers in exceptional schools.

Keywords: Mental health, teachers, exceptional schools, thematic analysis, self-efficacy, knowledge and awareness, mind management, quality of life, independence, environmental mastery, moral character, positive feelings, productivity.

1. Introduction

Mental health among teachers, especially those working in exceptional schools, is an essential yet often overlooked aspect of educational environments. Teachers in these settings face unique challenges that can significantly impact their mental health and well-being (Imran et al., 2018). Recent studies have highlighted the need for empowering teachers with the skills and knowledge to address mental health issues within their classrooms. For instance, Afshari et al. (2022) conducted a pilot study aimed at empowering teachers to screen, guide, and refer students with behavioral and mental health problems, emphasizing the importance of teacher involvement in promoting mental health in schools (Afshari et al., 2022). Similarly, Alenezi et al. (2022) examined the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of high school teachers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, towards students with mental disorders, underscoring the necessity of teacher training in mental health awareness and intervention (Alenezi et al., 2022).

Teachers' perceptions of their capabilities to promote mental health in school settings have also been explored in various contexts. Askeff-Williams and Cefai (2014) investigated the perspectives of Australian and Maltese teachers, revealing that while teachers recognize the importance of mental health promotion, they often feel inadequately prepared to address these issues effectively (Askeff-Williams & Cefai, 2014). This sentiment is echoed by Brann et al. (2020), who developed the School Mental Health Self-Efficacy Teacher Survey to assess teachers' confidence in managing mental health issues, finding that many teachers lack confidence in their ability to support students' mental health needs (Brann et al., 2020).

In early childhood education, the views of preschool educators on supporting children with mental health issues highlight similar concerns. Eleni (2021) found that preschool educators often feel unprepared to handle mental health issues, emphasizing the need for specialized training and resources (Eleni, 2021). This aligns with the findings of Hattersley (2023), who used interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore primary school teachers' experiences with children's mental health in the United Kingdom, revealing a sense of accomplishment when they can make a difference, but also highlighting the emotional toll it can take on teachers (Hattersley, 2023).

The World Health Organization has recognized the importance of school-based mental health interventions. Imran et al. (2018) and Imran et al. (2022) conducted studies

in Pakistan, demonstrating the effectiveness of mental health training programs for school teachers. These studies underscore the impact of structured training programs on enhancing teachers' ability to support students' mental health, which is critical for urban environments where mental health issues may be more prevalent (Imran et al., 2018; Imran et al., 2022).

Globally, the need for evidence-based youth mental health policies has been emphasized. Kutcher et al. (2019) described an integrated approach to addressing youth depression in Malawi and Tanzania, highlighting the importance of creating supportive policies and programs that can be adapted to different cultural contexts (Kutcher et al., 2019). Patel and Rahman (2015) also called for a global agenda for child mental health, advocating for comprehensive strategies that include teacher training as a key component (Patel & Rahman, 2015).

In Sibanda et al. (2022) explored the attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards mental health literacy, revealing gaps in knowledge and the need for ongoing education and support (Sibanda et al., 2022). This is further supported by Suen et al. (2021), who implemented the Mindshift Educational Networking Programme in Hong Kong, promoting a positive mental health culture in secondary schools through multifaceted approaches including teacher training (Suen et al., 2021).

The impact of teacher training on mental health knowledge and skills is well-documented. Tomé (2020) found that training programs significantly enhance teachers' ability to address mental health issues, which is crucial for fostering a supportive learning environment (Tomé, 2020). In the context of exceptional schools, teachers face additional challenges that require specialized training and support. Arvedson (2013) discussed the complexities of feeding children with cerebral palsy, highlighting the need for tailored approaches in exceptional settings (Arvedson, 2013).

Clark et al. (2023) investigated the identification of exceptional skills in school-age autistic children, pointing out the misconceptions and the importance of aligning informant perspectives. This is particularly relevant for teachers in exceptional schools who need to navigate these complexities to support their students effectively (Clark et al., 2023). Crepeau-Hobson and Bianco (2010) addressed the identification of gifted students with learning disabilities, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of student needs in a response-to-intervention framework (Crepeau-Hobson & Bianco, 2010).

Supporting teachers in managing the unique needs of students with special health care needs is also critical. Farrell and Swick (2014) examined network supports and resiliency among U.S. military spouses with children with special health care needs, drawing parallels to the support systems necessary for teachers in exceptional schools (Farrell & Swick, 2014). Similarly, Kim et al. (2016) discussed the Pediatric Cardiac Intensive Care Society's consensus statement, highlighting the importance of specialized care and support for children with complex health needs (Kim et al., 2016).

The role of parents and caregivers in supporting children with exceptional needs is another crucial aspect. Papadopoulos (2021) explored the social-emotional needs of gifted and talented children, advocating for a collaborative approach involving parents, teachers, and mental health professionals (Papadopoulos, 2021). Park et al. (2018) highlighted the experiences of Asian American parents of twice-exceptional children, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive support systems (Park et al., 2018).

Training teachers to work in inclusive settings for children with disabilities is also essential. Pasha et al. (2021) conducted a training needs assessment for teachers in inclusive settings, identifying key areas for development to better support students with disabilities. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's mental health further underscores the importance of teacher support (Pasha et al., 2021). Renzi et al. (2022) examined somatic, emotional, and behavioral symptomatology in children during the pandemic, highlighting the critical role of teachers in addressing these issues (Renzi et al., 2022).

Twice-exceptional students, those who are both gifted and have learning disabilities, require particular attention. Ronsley-Pavia (2015) and Ronsley-Pavia et al. (2018) explored the lived experiences and stigma narratives of twice-exceptional children, advocating for a strengths-based approach that recognizes their unique needs and talents. Supporting these students effectively requires a deep understanding of their experiences and challenges (Ronsley-Pavia, 2015; Ronsley-Pavia et al., 2018).

In healthcare contexts, the need for specialized support is evident. Shneider et al. (2005) discussed exceptions to the pediatric end-stage liver disease scoring system, highlighting the complexities of managing health conditions in children (Shneider et al., 2005). Zhou et al. (2021) examined dental care barriers among preschool children with special education needs, emphasizing the importance of

accessible and tailored healthcare services (Zhou et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the mental health of teachers in exceptional schools is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including knowledge, self-efficacy, mind management, quality of life, independence, environmental mastery, moral character, positive feelings, and productivity. Addressing these factors through targeted training programs, supportive policies, and collaborative approaches is essential for fostering a supportive educational environment that promotes the well-being of both teachers and students. This study aims to identify the components necessary for promoting mental health among teachers in exceptional schools in Tehran, providing insights that can inform future interventions and support systems.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This exploratory study employed a thematic analysis method and aimed at development. Participants were divided into two groups:

Qualitative Content Analysis Group: The target population for the qualitative content analysis included all published documents on teacher mental health from scientific databases. The study focused on documents published between 2000 and 2021.

Qualitative Interview Group: Participants in the interview group were academic experts familiar with mental health, including university faculty members with publications (books or articles) or who taught related courses. The inclusion criteria for this group were:

- University faculty members with at least an associate professor rank.
- At least one publication (article or book) in the field of mental health.
- A doctoral degree.

Purposeful sampling, aiming to select information-rich cases relevant to the study's objectives, was used for qualitative sampling. The sampling continued until data saturation was achieved, with a total of 14 experts initially interviewed, extending to 16 without adding new codes.

For model validation, snowball sampling was employed, resulting in 30 participants from the initial interview group and additional experts.

2.2. Data Collection

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, a valuable technique for obtaining detailed and in-depth information in social science research. This method allows researchers to gather comprehensive data, making it a central technique in qualitative research across various disciplines.

During interviews, the researcher controlled the accuracy of the responses by asking guiding questions. Data were analyzed iteratively to ensure completeness, adding new information from subsequent interviews. The process continued until theoretical saturation was reached.

For the content analysis, documents from scientific databases like Eric, Ebsco, Proquest, Springer, Science Direct, Magiran, and Irandoc were sampled using a theoretical sampling method. This iterative method involves selecting initial samples, analyzing data, and then sampling more documents to refine emerging categories and theories until data saturation is achieved.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility in probing deeper into specific areas of interest while maintaining a consistent set of guiding questions.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis to design the model. This inductive method, based on Berelson and Lazarsfeld's definition, involves a series of steps:

Initial Coding: All keywords were searched, and potential questions and objectives were identified. Articles and sources were searched in reputable scientific databases and libraries.

Review and Refinement: Results were reviewed and refined by three experts, excluding irrelevant sources.

Categorization and Description: Articles and texts were categorized and described. Relevant information was extracted and re-evaluated by two experts.

Thematic Analysis: Data were qualitatively analyzed, coded, and similar codes were grouped into subcategories. Continual comparison between data and codes led to the emergence of main categories.

Basic Themes Identification: Identifying parts of transcribed data useful for answering the research question. Basic themes were derived from semi-structured interviews with faculty members.

Organizing Themes: Moving beyond description to interpret meanings by combining basic themes with similar meanings. This step involved collaboration with advisors and colleagues.

Global Themes (Integration of Concepts): Identifying overarching themes that encapsulate the key concepts of the research. These were built on organizing themes but were at a higher level of abstraction. Efforts were made to keep the number of global themes limited, ensuring they were meaningfully connected to the majority of interviews.

3. Findings and Results

The analysis revealed several key themes and dimensions related to the mental health of teachers in exceptional schools. The identified themes are categorized into organizing themes, each containing multiple components that contribute to mental health. The following presents these organizing themes, their respective dimensions, and related components.

Table 1
Organizing Themes, Dimensions, and Components of Mental Health of Teachers in Exceptional Schools

Code	References	Basic Themes	Organizing Themes	No.
A	I4, I8, I5, I6, I3, I7	Knowledge of various learning disorders in students	Knowledge & Awareness	1
A	I5, I11, I4, I3	Understanding problems of students with learning disorders		2
A	I1, I2, I9, I7, I5	Awareness of teaching methods for students in exceptional schools		3
A	I8, I7, I11, I15	Familiarity with practical teaching methods for exceptional students		4
A	I7, I3, I9, I10, I11	Understanding the evaluation of students with learning difficulties		5
B	I10, I6, I5, I1, I7	Aligning interests and abilities of teachers in exceptional schools	Self-Efficacy	6
B	I10, I6, I5, I1, I7	Balancing job demands and work resources		7
B	I13, I14, I11, I5	Teachers' self-belief in their abilities in exceptional schools		8
B	I10, I8, I3	Personal beliefs about coping with various situations in exceptional schools		9
B	I1, I2, I9, I7, I5	Perception of self-efficacy during teaching in exceptional schools	Mind Management	10
C	I6, I8, I10, I13, I4	Timely decision-making by teachers during teaching in exceptional schools		11
C	I10, I8, I1, I13, I14	Intellectual independence of teachers in exceptional schools		12
C	I1, I2, I9, I7, I5	Managing internal and external mental control		13
C	I11, I12, I10, I14	Controlling destructive thoughts in teachers in exceptional schools		14

C	I11, I9, I14, I4	Setting specific algorithms for complex tasks		15
D	I6, I1, I2	Regular and appropriate exercise	Quality of Life	16
D	I11, I7, I10, I3, I1	Proper nutrition		17
D	I8, I3, I5, I4, I2	Stress management		18
E	I1, I2, I9, I7, I5	Self-management	Independence	19
E	I3, I9, I5, I4, I2	Managing relationships with others		20
E	I4, I8, I15, I6, I1	Managing one's emotions		21
E	I5, I11, I4, I3	Mind management		22
F	I1, I2, I9, I7, I5	Independence in thought	Environmental Mastery	23
F	I8, I7, I11, I15	Adherence to rules and regulations		24
F	I7, I3, I9, I10, I11	Calm decision-making		25
F	I1, I9, I13	Managing environmental crises		26
G	I13, I7, I3	Helping others	Moral Character	27
G	I11, I12, I14, I2, I9	Conscientiousness in work		28
G	I1, I2, I9, I7, I5	Diligence in performing tasks		29
G	I6, I7, I5, I4	Respecting other teachers and students in exceptional schools		30
H	I1, I2, I9, I7, I5	Enhancing emotional control	Positive Feeling	31
H	I7, I5, I1, I12	Interest in exceptional students		32
H	I11, I8, I4, I9	Mental security while teaching exceptional students		33
H	I1, I2, I9, I7, I5	Understanding all aspects and difficulties of teaching in exceptional schools		34
I	I4, I2, I6	Creating a sense of security in relationships among teachers in exceptional schools	Productivity	35
I	I10, I9, I1, I6, I11	Academic progress of exceptional students		36
I	I6, I8, I10, I3, I4	Time management in teaching in exceptional school classes		37
I	I10, I8, I1, I3, I4	Interest in teaching exceptional students		38
I	I3, I1, I5, I4, I6	Complete understanding of exceptional students		39

The analysis of the interviews and content analysis revealed several key themes and dimensions related to the mental health of teachers in exceptional schools. Each organizing theme, along with its dimensions and components, provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to mental health in this unique educational setting.

3.1. Knowledge & Awareness

Teachers in exceptional schools emphasized the importance of understanding various learning disorders and their impacts on students. This includes knowledge about different learning disorders, problems faced by students with learning disorders, appropriate teaching methods, practical teaching strategies, and effective evaluation techniques. One participant highlighted, "Being aware of the types of learning disorders helps me tailor my teaching methods to meet each student's needs" (I4, I8, I5, I6, I3, I7).

3.2. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy emerged as a crucial dimension, encompassing the alignment of teachers' interests and abilities with their roles, balancing job demands and resources, self-belief in their abilities, personal coping mechanisms, and perceived effectiveness in teaching. As one teacher stated, "Believing in my capabilities enables me

to handle diverse situations in the classroom effectively" (I10, I6, I5, I1, I7).

3.3. Mind Management

Effective mind management was identified as another essential dimension, involving timely decision-making, intellectual independence, managing internal and external control, and controlling destructive thoughts. A teacher mentioned, "Managing my thoughts and emotions helps me stay focused and make better decisions during challenging teaching moments" (I6, I8, I10, I13, I4).

3.4. Quality of Life

Quality of life factors such as regular exercise, proper nutrition, and stress management were highlighted as vital for maintaining mental health. One interviewee noted, "Maintaining a balanced lifestyle with proper diet and regular exercise keeps me physically and mentally prepared for my teaching responsibilities" (I6, I1, I2).

3.5. Independence

Independence in managing oneself, relationships, emotions, and mind was another key theme. This includes self-management, relationship management, emotional management, and mental management. One participant shared, "Being able to manage my emotions and

relationships effectively is crucial for my overall well-being" (I1, I2, I9, I7, I5).

3.6. Environmental Mastery

Teachers also stressed the importance of environmental mastery, which involves independence in thought, adherence to rules and regulations, calm decision-making, and managing environmental crises. A teacher explained, "Adhering to rules and being calm in decision-making help me navigate the complexities of teaching in an exceptional school" (I1, I2, I9, I7, I5).

3.7. Moral Character

Moral character, including helping others, conscientiousness, diligence, and respect for colleagues and students, was another significant dimension. An interviewee remarked, "Showing respect to colleagues and students fosters a positive and supportive teaching environment" (I13, I7, I3).

3.8. Positive Feeling

Positive feelings such as enhancing emotional control, interest in students, mental security while teaching, and understanding the challenges of the job were crucial for mental health. One teacher commented, "Having a positive attitude towards my students and feeling secure in my role makes a big difference in my mental health" (I1, I2, I9, I7, I5).

3.9. Productivity

Lastly, productivity factors such as creating a sense of security in relationships among teachers, academic progress of students, time management, and a deep understanding of students were highlighted. A teacher shared, "Effective time management and a deep understanding of my students' needs contribute to a productive teaching experience" (I4, I2, I6).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify the key components necessary for promoting mental health among teachers in exceptional schools in Tehran. The findings revealed a range of factors contributing to teachers' mental health, including knowledge and awareness, self-efficacy, mind management, quality of life, independence, environmental mastery, moral character, positive feelings, and productivity. These findings

are consistent with and extend the current body of literature on teacher mental health and underscore the effectiveness of targeted interventions.

One of the primary findings of this study was the critical role of knowledge and awareness in promoting mental health among teachers in exceptional schools. Teachers who have a deep understanding of various learning disorders and effective teaching strategies are better equipped to manage their classrooms and support their students. This aligns with the work of Afshari et al. (2022), who found that empowering teachers with knowledge about mental health can significantly enhance their ability to screen, guide, and refer students with behavioral and mental health problems (Afshari et al., 2022). Similarly, Alenezi et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of teacher training in mental health awareness, demonstrating that increased knowledge leads to better attitudes and practices towards students with mental disorders (Alenezi et al., 2022).

Self-efficacy emerged as a significant component of mental health for teachers. The ability to align personal interests and abilities with professional demands, coupled with a strong belief in one's capabilities, plays a crucial role in how teachers perceive and handle their responsibilities. Brann et al. (2020) supported this notion through the development of the School Mental Health Self-Efficacy Teacher Survey, which highlighted the importance of self-efficacy in managing mental health issues. Teachers who believe in their abilities are more likely to feel competent and confident in their roles, reducing stress and improving overall mental health (Brann et al., 2020).

Effective mind management, including timely decision-making, intellectual independence, and controlling destructive thoughts, was another critical factor identified in this study. This finding resonates with Hattersley (2023), who explored primary school teachers' experiences with children's mental health in the UK, revealing that the ability to manage thoughts and emotions is essential for teachers to feel effective and fulfilled in their roles (Hattersley, 2023). Teachers who can control their mental processes are better positioned to handle the challenges of teaching in exceptional schools, contributing to their mental well-being.

Quality of life factors, such as regular exercise, proper nutrition, and stress management, were found to be vital for maintaining mental health. The significance of a balanced lifestyle for teachers is well-documented in the literature. For example, Eleni (2021) emphasized the need for preschool educators to maintain their well-being to effectively support children with mental health issues (Eleni,

2021). Similarly, Imran et al. (2022) demonstrated the effectiveness of school-based mental health interventions that include components aimed at improving teachers' quality of life, such as stress management techniques (Imran et al., 2022).

Independence in managing oneself, relationships, emotions, and mind was another key theme. This includes self-management, relationship management, emotional management, and mental management. The ability to navigate these areas independently is crucial for mental health. This finding is supported by the work of Suen et al. (2021), who implemented the Mindshift Educational Networking Programme in Hong Kong. The program emphasized the importance of fostering independence among teachers to create a positive mental health culture in schools (Suen et al., 2021).

Environmental mastery, which involves independence in thought, adherence to rules and regulations, calm decision-making, and managing environmental crises, was highlighted as an important dimension of mental health. This finding aligns with the research by Sibanda et al. (2022), who explored teachers' attitudes towards mental health literacy in Zimbabwe. They found that teachers with a high degree of environmental mastery were better able to manage classroom dynamics and support students' mental health needs effectively (Sibanda et al., 2022).

Moral character, including helping others, conscientiousness, diligence, and respect for colleagues and students, was another significant dimension. The importance of moral character in promoting mental health is echoed by Patel and Rahman (2015), who called for a global agenda for child mental health that includes ethical considerations and the development of moral character among educators (Patel & Rahman, 2015). Teachers who exhibit strong moral character are more likely to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment, which is beneficial for both their mental health and that of their students.

Positive feelings, such as enhancing emotional control, interest in students, mental security while teaching, and understanding the challenges of the job, were crucial for mental health. This finding is consistent with the work of Kutcher et al. (2019), who highlighted the importance of positive mental health initiatives in creating supportive school environments. Teachers who maintain a positive outlook and feel secure in their roles are better equipped to handle the stresses of teaching in exceptional schools (Kutcher et al., 2019).

Finally, productivity factors, such as creating a sense of security in relationships among teachers, academic progress of students, time management, and a deep understanding of students, were highlighted as important for mental health. Tomé (2020) emphasized that effective teacher training programs significantly enhance teachers' productivity and ability to support students' mental health. Teachers who feel productive and see the positive outcomes of their efforts are more likely to experience high levels of job satisfaction and mental well-being (Tomé, 2020).

The findings of this study have significant implications for practice. To promote mental health among teachers in exceptional schools, it is essential to develop comprehensive training programs that address the identified components. Such programs should focus on increasing knowledge and awareness about mental health, enhancing self-efficacy, and providing tools for effective mind management. Additionally, supporting teachers in maintaining a high quality of life, fostering independence, and developing strong moral character are crucial steps.

Implementing these programs requires collaboration between educational institutions, mental health professionals, and policymakers. For instance, school administrations can provide regular professional development opportunities focused on mental health, while mental health professionals can offer ongoing support and counseling services. Policymakers can advocate for policies that prioritize teacher mental health and allocate resources to implement effective programs.

Future research should continue to explore the multifaceted nature of teacher mental health in exceptional schools. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of mental health interventions on teachers' well-being and job performance. Additionally, exploring the specific challenges faced by teachers in different cultural contexts can help tailor interventions to meet diverse needs.

Research should also investigate the impact of student mental health on teachers' well-being. Understanding this dynamic can inform the development of holistic approaches that support both teachers and students. Moreover, studies examining the role of technology in promoting teacher mental health could provide innovative solutions for remote or underserved areas.

The present study underscores the complexity of mental health among teachers in exceptional schools and highlights the effectiveness of targeted interventions. By addressing the identified components, such as knowledge, self-efficacy,

mind management, quality of life, independence, environmental mastery, moral character, positive feelings, and productivity, educational systems can create supportive environments that foster both teacher and student well-being. The findings provide a foundation for developing comprehensive mental health programs and underscore the need for ongoing research and collaboration to address the unique challenges faced by teachers in exceptional schools.

Authors' Contributions

The first author was responsible for conducting the interview and collecting data, and the other authors were responsible for analyzing the data and writing the article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We hereby thank all participants for agreeing to record the interview and participate in the research.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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