

Library Services and Facilities to Differently-Abled Users of the Indian Institute of Technology, Bhopal and the Indian Institute of Technology, Design and Management, Jabalpur: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to compare the accessibility and inclusivity measures of the libraries and institutes at IIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur for differently-abled users. The study delves into the facilities, services, policies, and resources that these institutions offer to cater to the needs of such users. The data collection process involves offline questionnaires filled out by library professionals and unstructured interviews with them, as well as assessing the institutional websites for relevant information. The findings of the study highlight both the similarities and differences between the two institutions. While both IIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur have policies in line with government directives and provide basic amenities such as computer systems, CCTV surveillance, and scanners, there are differences in the accessibility infrastructure, specialized reading materials provided, and funding allotted for assisting users with disabilities. The study concludes with recommendations for improving inclusivity and accessibility in the library environments of both IIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur. These recommendations include investing in accessibility infrastructure, acquiring specialized reading materials, allocating dedicated budgets, implementing special services and support programs, engaging stakeholders, providing training and awareness, and conducting regular evaluations of accessibility initiatives. By implementing these recommendations, both institutions can create more inclusive and accessible library environments that cater to the diverse needs of all users, promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion within the academic community.

Keywords: Accessibility; Differently-abled users; Library facilities; Inclusivity; Accessible infrastructure; Disability policies; Assistive technologies; Disability awareness; Accessibility initiatives; Policy compliance; Inclusive practices; Library environment; Indian Institute of Information Technology.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the 2011 Census, 2.68 Cr people (2.21%) of India's 121 Cr population, are classified as disabled. Among them, 5% have completed college or higher, while 13% have only completed their secondary or matriculation education. Graduates are around 8.5% of literate disabled people (The Office of the Chief

Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, 2021). This percentage could be increased by proper support in education and other aspects of lifelong learning. Education is an integral part of everyone's life and for this, libraries play a crucial role. Libraries have been at the forefront of providing equal access to information and resources for all members of society for centuries. They have played a critical role in promoting literacy, encouraging lifelong learning, and providing access to information and resources that support social, personal, and professional growth. In light of information and communication tools and technologies, libraries are gradually changing to fulfill the information needs of the current generation of users. The library building is changed, library materials are reorganized and revised, library services are developed and updated, ICT infrastructure is improved and updated, and library staff members are given new training and tools to help them adapt to the contemporary environment. The library and its staff are preparing to provide its users with all necessary facilities, services, and infrastructure. Every user shall receive equal consideration and service therefore libraries must upgrade their ICT infrastructure by adding software, such as screen readers, character magnifiers, and braille converters, and necessary hardware, such as accessible keyboards, etc. The libraries must provide new services or alter current services to their users.

All users of libraries are guaranteed physical access by providing amenities including ramps, elevators, and accessible bathrooms that are intended to accommodate a range of impairments. For those who have visual impairments or learning disabilities, many libraries provide accessible technology such as Braille displays, text-to-speech software, magnifiers, and screen readers, and a variety of accessible formats, such as e-books, big print materials, and audiobooks, so that users with print or vision impairments may enjoy reading on their own. Library professionals provide individualized support to patrons with disabilities, assisting them in locating items, navigating the library catalogue, and obtaining information in forms that meet their needs. To promote a feeling of community and inclusivity, libraries host workshops, support groups, and activities specially catered to their differently-abled clients' needs and interests.

Differently-abled: Defined

The term "disabled" is criticized for its negative and exclusionary connotations. It is seen as

stigmatizing, demeaning, and marginalizing, creating a sense of inferiority, abnormality, and dependence for people with disabilities (PwDs). The prefix "dis-" in "disabled" emphasizes a lack or incompleteness, reinforcing a perception of incapacity and imperfection. An alternative phrase, "differently abled," is proposed as a more positive and empowering term, aiming to convey a message of capability and avoid discriminatory undertones traditionally associated with terms like "disabled" or "handicapped." This proposed change aligns with ongoing shifts toward a more inclusive language (**Leshota and Sefotho, 2020**). The term "differently abled" dates back just thirty years, having first appeared in American culture in the 1980s. This phrase first appeared in print in The Los Angeles Times in September 1980, where it was used for the festival workers. Subsequently, the same phrases and meanings of the phrase gained popularity (**Literary Devices Editors, n.d.**).

According to the **Merriam-Webster Thesaurus**, differently abled means "deprived of the power to perform one or more natural bodily activities." (**Merriam-Webster, n.d.**) The synonyms include disabled, challenged, impaired, paralyzed, special needs, etc.

According to the **Cambridge Dictionary** "a polite way to describe someone who has a disability (= an illness, injury, or condition that makes it difficult for them to do some things that other people do), which some people dislike because it ignores the particular difficulties disabled people have in society." (**Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.**)

Acts and Policies in India for Differently-abled

Acts and policies play a crucial role in shaping and safeguarding societies by establishing rules, regulations, and standards to address various issues. Acts and policies specifically addressing disabilities are extremely important for several reasons, including the protection of rights, the encouragement of inclusion, the avoidance of discrimination, the facilitation of support, etc. Disability-related laws and regulations are essential instruments for building a society that is more equitable and inclusive. They offer a solid legal basis for defending the rights of people with disabilities, promoting an atmosphere that celebrates diversity and guarantees everyone has equal chances. India has several acts and policies to protect the rights and promote the well-being of persons with disabilities. Some major acts are as follows:

- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**

This comprehensive act replaced the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, of 1995. The 2016 Act enhances the scope of disabilities, increases reservation in government jobs, and introduces penalties for offenses committed against persons with disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was amended in 2023 for ICT products and services.

- **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), 2015**

Launched by the Government of India, this campaign aims to create an inclusive and accessible environment for persons with disabilities by improving infrastructure, public transportation, and information and communication technologies.

- **The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006**

The government created the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities with a focus on the Prevention of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Measures to create an environment that gives these individuals equal opportunities to protect their rights and full participation in society. The government recognized that people with disabilities are a valuable human resource for the nation and that the majority of them can lead better lives if they have equal opportunities and effective access to rehabilitation measures (National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, 2024).

Assistive Technology

According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, "Assistive technology is the application of organized knowledge and skills related to assistive products, including systems and services. Assistive technology is a subset of health technology" (**World Health Organization, 2016**).

Tools, equipment, software, and other gadgets known as assistive technologies are made to make it easier for people with special needs or impairments to complete activities that they may otherwise find difficult or impossible. Promoting independence, accessibility, and inclusion for individuals with a range of disabilities—including physical, sensory, cognitive, and developmental impairments—is greatly aided by these technologies. Mobility aids,

screen readers, JAWS software, and NVDA are a few examples of assistive technologies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Khan et. al (2023) analyzed related literature utilizing PubMed, EMBASE, and grey literature databases to find papers related to COVID-19 and found the difficulties experienced by COVID-19 pandemic survivors with a Visual Impairment (VI). It detects social isolation and contact avoidance barriers, which are particularly difficult for people who depend on touch and spatial awareness. People with visual impairments face challenges during the pandemic due to the lack of complete and up-to-date information about COVID-19 transmission and prevention. As a result, it is challenging for them to have an accessible emergency preparedness plan and health guidelines. There are a variety of approaches that may be used, such as online assistance and more specialized information that is more accessible, including audio formats. The authors suggested that as long as the pandemic persists, there is an urgent need for greater awareness of this problem. When developing health rules in the future, this user community must be taken into account.

Salauddin (2022) studied the accessibility of information resources at Dr. Shakuntala Misra Rehabilitation National University, Lucknow provided to 110 disabled users and found that differently-abled students use library resources and services in a significant manner. The students visit the library mostly for research work (29.16%) and least for preparing for classes (16.66%) Most of the students (58.33%) do not find the required resources in the proper format. Students who were wheelchair-bound or physically disabled found difficulty in accessing the bookshelves. Further, the librarian and staff's roles were found to be important for assistance. The students required efficient tools and equipment like text-to-speech, braille books, large print books, etc. for proper assistance.

Nazim et. al. (2021) analyzed the services and facilities provided by Aligarh Muslim University Library to offer its disabled users the facilities and resources they need. Some prominent services and facilities provided by the library were JAWS, computers with internet, braille books, scanners, etc. It was found that there are still some gaps in the availability of assistive devices, the proper format of resources, etc. Despite the provision

of some specialized services, accessing library services presents several challenges for users with impairments. Obstacles arise from a lack of modern assistive technologies or equipment to support access to library resources and services, a lack of adequate training or orientation for users with disabilities regarding how to use library resources and services, a lack of training or orientation programs for staff, and the availability of necessary library materials in convenient formats were identified in this study.

Mahawariya & Yadav (2021) discussed in their paper about the Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC) which is a specialized center for specially-abled students, in Delhi. The purpose of this study was to look into the various resources and services available at EOC. An interactive and feedback approach was followed. For this, questionnaires and interviews were scheduled to collect data. The participants chosen were the head and related staff of EOC along with 63 students. It was found that EOC has 3 audio book production studios, 2 highly capable Braille embossers, thousands of Braille books, and talking books from outsourcing agencies. EOC had almost all the equipment required by special users as well as good infrastructural facilities. EOC also organized sports events for physically handicapped students. It was found that around 50% of students were extremely satisfied, and 16% were unsatisfied due to the unavailability of alternate formats and scanned magazines. The findings concluded that EOC is effectively helping to create a barrier-free environment and needs as per the changing digital environment.

Ambika & Ganeshan (2021) explored the web content to analyze the information available on library websites and highlight some special features like library timings, storage device services, current awareness services, etc. 13 University library websites in India were selected. Based on data collection, the findings revealed that out of 13 central university library websites, 8 libraries had provided links as the main heading whereas 5 had given them as a second-level heading. The majority of websites had not provided information on the mission, copyright sitemap, and library committee. Except for one library, the remaining 12 libraries had mentioned library timings. Regarding software, circulation, Online Public Access Catalogue, Current Awareness Services, and Developing Library Network most of the websites had indicated the services. Out of 13, only 5 had mentioned the information about CD/DVD. Two university library websites provided remarkable

services like talking library and Braille section. The authors recommended developing a one-stop portal website that carries quality information and also highlights unique services to attract disabled users.

Ahmed and Naveed (2020) analyzed that most, disabled users approach their teachers, friends, family, and fellow students for academic advice. Moreover, some users mentioned using the internet for audiobooks, research articles, and multimedia for information seeking. The authors found that the users mostly do not prefer online databases and catalogs due to unawareness and navigational issues. Some users also specified the limited use of libraries for information due to the lack of specialized resources in proper format and the staff's non-supportive attitude. It was found that braille, JAWS, audio, and e-formats were the most preferable formats by visually impaired users. The barriers were mostly related to format and lack of ICT skills followed by navigational and financial barriers.

Patil and Kumbar (2020) conducted a critical examination of literature published in the first two decades of the 21st century regarding public library services for differently-abled individuals, presenting it in chronological order. The primary objectives of the paper involve assessing the current scenario of public library services for differently-abled persons worldwide. The conclusion highlights that the present status of public library services for differently-abled individuals is disheartening, with the majority of public libraries failing to provide even basic services to this user group. This underscores the urgent need for significant improvements in services and emphasizes the necessity for further research in the area of resources.

Dodamani & Dodamani (2019) conducted a study to know the status of assistive technology to support students with visual impairments. The study was conducted in 185 Central, Deemed, and State universities in India. A survey method was adopted and a stratified sampling technique was used. Data was collected and analyzed using MS Excel. Of the total responses received, 70.81% were from state universities followed by 16.21% from central and 12.97% from deemed universities. The major findings were that 12.97% had Braille books in their collection, 22.70% had made provision for Assistive Technologies (ATs) to assist Visually Impaired students, 22.70% had accessible library websites, 22.70% of universities had Optical Character Recognition scanners, and 22.70% Universities Libraries had written policies for

disabled users. The authors suggested that libraries should understand the importance of ATs and implementation to be done for becoming inclusive libraries.

Gill et. al. (2017) discussed the challenges faced by visually impaired students in their higher education through e-learning in Delhi. They identified problems related to the availability, accessibility, efficacy, and affordability of e-learning systems. According to the findings, a small percentage (1.85%) of visually impaired students reported a lack of knowledge in using e-learning systems, while some students struggled to understand due to limited proficiency in English. It also highlighted the problem of availability faced by visually impaired students in accessing e-learning resources. Specifically, it mentions the lack of suitable software for regional languages like Hindi, the absence of solutions for describing pictures and images, and the unavailability of resources in a clear voice. The authors suggested that government literacy programs should be implemented at all levels of education to support visually impaired students in e-learning. This includes designing websites according to international standards for screen reader compatibility, providing books in various digital formats, developing specialized e-learning resources, and ensuring quality standards in book conversion processes. Additionally, provisions such as a helpline, Indian voice screen readers, affordable technology, and proper description of visual content should be made available to enhance accessibility and efficacy in e-learning for visually impaired students.

Srivastava and Bhatt (2016) opined that students with disabilities are much more dependent on library services as compared to normal/ abled students. To provide effective and efficient library services to them, the application of marketing tools in the promotion of library products and services is necessary. Libraries should be focused on inclusive education. It should be designed to meet the educational needs. Authors suggested some measures to make libraries more inclusive like assistance in using library holdings, Braille, Tactile and signage, social awareness, free and affordable apps for library resource usage, etc. They suggested promotion tools like communication, brochures, leaflets, posters, newsletters, newsgroups, e-commerce, blogs, etc. The authors concluded that there is a need to provide inclusive library services along with public relations with its users by promoting the library.

OBJECTIVES

- i) To find out the basic facilities and infrastructure available in the library and campus for differently-abled users.
- ii) To find out the reading materials formats available for the users.
- iii) To analyze the provisions available in the institute for differently-abled users.
- iv) To find out the best practices of the institutes for differently-abled users.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The scope of the study is limited to only two Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIIT): Indian Institute of Information Technology, Bhopal based on the campus of Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology (MANIT), Bhopal Room No TC-105, New Teaching Block, MANIT, Bhopal, MP, India, and PDPM Indian Institute of Information Technology, Design and Manufacturing, Jabalpur, M.P. The study uses a mixed method for collecting the data. An offline questionnaire was distributed to the library professionals of the selected institutes. The quantitative data was also drawn from the official institutional websites of IIITDM Jabalpur (<https://iiitdmj.ac.in/>) and IIIT Bhopal (<https://www.iiitbhopal.ac.in/#!/>).

The qualitative data was collected with the help of an interview with the library professionals. The unstructured interview was conducted about the user services and the best practices of the libraries. The data was collected in the questionnaire and the results were analyzed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Basic facilities and infrastructure

Table 1 Basic facilities and infrastructure in the library building and campus for differently-abled users

Facilities/ Services	IIIT Bhopal	IIITDM Jabalpur
Ramps	Yes	Yes
Handrails for support	Yes	Yes
Special Toilet/ Restroom	Yes	Yes
Elevator/ Lift	No	Yes

Table Cont..

Reserved Parking	Yes	No
Accessible Furniture	No	No
Unobstructed and non-slip floor	Yes	Yes
Separate reading rooms	Yes	No
Signage	Yes	Yes

The analysis from Table 1 shows that both IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur provide ramps, which are essential for wheelchair users to access different parts of the buildings easily. Both institutions have handrails for support, which can assist individuals with mobility challenges in navigating stairs and inclines safely. Both IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur offer special toilets or restrooms, catering to the specific needs of differently-abled individuals. IIIT Bhopal does not have an elevator or lift, which could pose challenges for individuals with mobility impairments, especially those who cannot use stairs. In contrast, IIITDM Jabalpur has an elevator/lift, enhancing accessibility within the buildings. IIIT Bhopal provides reserved parking spaces for differently-abled users, ensuring convenient access to the campus. However, IIITDM Jabalpur does not offer this facility. Neither institution provides accessible furniture tailored to the needs of differently-abled individuals, which could impact comfort and usability. Both IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur have unobstructed and non-slip floors, promoting safety for all users, including those with mobility challenges. IIIT Bhopal offers separate reading rooms for differently-abled users, potentially providing a quieter and more focused environment. In contrast, IIITDM Jabalpur does not have this facility. Both institutions have signage, which is crucial for providing directions and information in a clear and accessible manner for all users.

Reading material formats available

Table 2 Reading materials format available in the library

Reading Material Format	IIIT Bhopal	IIITDM Jabalpur
Braille Books	No	No
Talking Books On Cds	No	No
Talking Books In Audio Cassettes	No	No
Large Print Books	No	No
E-Contents/ Scanned Texts	Yes	Yes
Online Journals	Yes	Yes
E- Newspapers	Yes	No
Other	E-Databases (2)	Cds/Dvds (2317)

Table 2 shows that neither IIIT Bhopal nor IIITDM Jabalpur offers Braille books, which are essential for visually impaired individuals who read using touch. Both institutions do not provide talking books on CDs, which are audio recordings of books for individuals who are visually impaired or have difficulty reading. Similar to talking books on CDs, neither institution offers talking books on audio cassettes. There are no large print books available at either IIIT Bhopal or IIITDM Jabalpur, which are beneficial for individuals with low vision. Both institutions offer e-contents and scanned texts, which can be accessed digitally, benefiting various types of users, including those with print disabilities. Both IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur provide access to online journals, allowing users to access academic articles and research materials digitally. IIIT Bhopal offers e-newspapers, providing access to news content in digital format. However, IIITDM Jabalpur does not offer this service. IIIT Bhopal provides access to e-databases, while IIITDM Jabalpur offers CDs/DVDs, specifically mentioning a significant number (2317). E-databases and CDs/DVDs can contain various types of academic and educational materials.

Provisions available for the differently-abled users

Table 3 Provisions available in the institute for differently-abled users

Statement	IIIT Bhopal	IIITDM Jabalpur
Does your library provide special services for users with disabilities/ special needs?	No	No
Do you have any policy for differently-abled users per the Government of India?	Yes	Yes
Do you have any policy for differently-abled users as per the Institution?	Yes	Yes
Do you have any special budget for the collection development and purchasing of equipment for users with disabilities?	No	No

Table 3 shows that both IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur libraries do not provide special services for users with disabilities or special needs. This indicates a lack of targeted assistance or accommodations for this user group within the library services. Both institutions have policies in place for differently-abled users as per the Government of India guidelines. This suggests compliance with national regulations and

standards regarding accessibility and support for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, both IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur have their policies for differently-abled users, independent of the government guidelines. This indicates that the institutions recognize the importance of addressing the needs of this user group beyond the minimum requirements set by the government. Neither IIIT Bhopal nor IIITDM Jabalpur has a special budget allocated for the collection development and purchasing of equipment specifically for users with disabilities. This suggests that financial resources are not specifically earmarked to enhance accessibility or provide specialized equipment for this user group within the libraries.

Best practices

Table 4 Best practices of the libraries/institutes

Special Features	IIIT Bhopal	IIITDM Jabalpur
Wheelchair Availability	Yes	No
CDS/DVDS	Yes	Yes
Computer Systems	Yes	Yes
CCTV	Yes	Yes
Scanners	Yes	Yes
Opac	Yes	Yes
Reference Services/CAS	Yes	Yes
E-Notice App (Android)*	Yes	No
COLORS BHARAT (E-Learning Startup)**	Yes	No
IIITB Connects (Android Mobile App)***	Yes	No
Moodle@IIIT Bhopal****	Yes	No
Screen Reader Access	No	Yes
Website Language Preference in English and Hindi	No	Yes
Equal Opportunity Policy for Persons with Disabilities	No	Yes
Accessibility Statement on the Website	No	Yes

*Android-based electronic notice application.
 **An e-learning startup by the students for technical courses, placements, internships, etc.
 An Android mobile app for enquiring queries, discussing problems and building connections with fellow students. *A portal for online discussions, course materials, news, etc.

Table 4 shows that IIIT Bhopal offers wheelchair availability, while IIITDM Jabalpur does not offer. Both institutions offer features like CDs/DVDs,

Computer Systems, CCTV, Scanners, OPAC, and Reference Services/CAS. IIIT Bhopal has the feature of an E-Notice App (Android), but IIITDM Jabalpur does not. COLORS BHARAT (E-learning startup), IIITB Connects (Android Mobile App), and Moodle@IIITBhopal are some of the special features that are available at IIIT Bhopal but not at IIITDM Jabalpur. Features like Screen Reader Access, Website Language Preference in English and Hindi, Equal Opportunity Policy for Persons with Disabilities, and Accessibility Statement are available at IIITDM Jabalpur but not at IIIT Bhopal.

FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of the tables provided, several key findings can be drawn regarding the comparison between IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur in terms of facilities, services, policies, and resources for differently-abled users:

Accessibility Infrastructure: IIITDM Jabalpur generally demonstrates a higher level of accessibility infrastructure compared to IIIT Bhopal, as evidenced by the presence of features such as lifts, accessible campuses, and reserved parking spaces.

Library Facilities and Services: IIIT Bhopal offers specific facilities tailored to the needs of differently-abled users, such as separate reading rooms and e-newspapers, which are not available at IIITDM Jabalpur. However, IIITDM Jabalpur provides a broader range of accessible reading materials, including a significant collection of CDs/DVDs, which could cater to various preferences and needs among differently-abled users.

Policies and Budget Allocation: Both institutions have policies in place for differently-abled users, aligning with both government guidelines and institution-specific regulations. However, neither institution has a dedicated budget for collection development or equipment procurement specifically aimed at supporting users with disabilities.

Specialized Reading Materials: Neither institution provides specialized reading materials such as Braille books, talking books, or large print books, indicating a gap in catering to the needs of visually impaired users.

Special Services and Support: while both institutions offer several common features, there are some differences in the availability of specific

features. IIIT Bhopal seems to have more digital platforms and e-learning initiatives, while IIITDM Jabalpur focuses more on accessibility and support for persons with disabilities.

SUGGESTIONS

To guarantee fair access for those with mobility impairments, IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur should give top priority to installing accessible facilities including ramps, lifts, and railings throughout their campuses.

The IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur should consider allocating special funds for the development of collections and the purchase of equipment meant to assist users with impairments. This might involve financing for the purchase of assistive technology, documents in accessible forms, and infrastructure improvements related to accessibility.

Both institutions should provide training and awareness programs for library staff on disability awareness, inclusive practices, and the effective use of assistive technologies. This can empower staff to better support differently abled users and create a more inclusive library culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the comparison between IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur regarding facilities, services, policies, and resources for differently abled users reveals both similarities and differences. While both institutions have implemented policies aligned with government guidelines and offer basic facilities such as computer systems, CCTV, and scanners, there are notable variations in their accessibility infrastructure, provision of specialized reading materials, and allocation of budgets for supporting users with disabilities. IIITDM Jabalpur demonstrates a higher level of accessibility infrastructure with features like lifts and accessible campuses, indicating a more inclusive environment for individuals with mobility impairments. However, IIIT Bhopal offers specific facilities such as separate reading rooms and e-newspapers, etc.

IIIT Bhopal and IIITDM Jabalpur have the potential to improve accessibility and inclusivity in their library settings in the future by filling in infrastructure deficiencies, increasing the selection of specialized reading materials, and setting aside funds specifically for the assistance of patrons with

disabilities. Prioritizing these areas will help both organizations build more inclusive and equitable library spaces that welcome all patrons and promote an inclusive and accessible culture.

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