

# Critical pedagogy and gender norms: insights from Moroccan educational settings

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the use of critical pedagogy in Moroccan educational settings to challenge persistent gender norms and power dynamics. The thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with educators indicates critical pedagogy's impact on gender role perceptions and practices. The findings show how critical pedagogy encourages critical consciousness and challenges old conventions, promoting gender equity in the classrooms. Teachers' viewpoints illustrate both the problems and accomplishments of implementing critical pedagogy, emphasizing its ability to foster inclusive learning environments. This study provides insight into critical pedagogy's transformative impact on instructors' practices and students' involvement with gender dynamics in Morocco. By explaining these educational practices, the study highlights critical pedagogy as a catalyst for achieving social justice in Moroccan schools, emphasizing the importance of pedagogical techniques that support equitable learning and question cultural norms.

**KEYWORDS:** critical pedagogy; Moroccan educational settings; gender role; cultural norms.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender roles and power structures are intrinsically connected to the foundation of Moroccan culture, which is diverse and dynamic. These roles and structures are mirrored and shaped by various cultural forces, including political movements, educational institutions, and, most importantly, the media. Media portrayals are essential in



reflecting and reinforcing society's standards, influencing how people perceive themselves and others within their social environment. In a society where traditional values coexist with current aspirations, knowing how these influences affect cultural norms is critical for developing inclusive societies.

Moroccan educators are at the cutting edge of societal reform despite these complications. They negotiate the rich textiles of cultural tradition while facing current classroom issues. Armed with firsthand knowledge and sharp insights, these teachers provide distinct viewpoints on how gender roles and power dynamics are seen and maintained in Moroccan society. The impact of these roles and structures on education, and vice versa, remains an important field of research and knowledge (Chentoufi, Alla, & Mamdouh, 2024).

This qualitative study applies critical pedagogy, a methodology adopted by Paulo Freire (1987) and adapted by authors such as Henry Giroux (2020) that emphasizes critical engagement with prevailing narratives to promote social justice and equity in educational settings. It seeks to study how Moroccan educators' perspectives of gender roles and power dynamics are shaped by their lived experiences in Morocco's cultural, political, and media landscape. By investigating these relationships, the study hopes to illuminate underlying mechanisms and reveal the potential for affecting beneficial shifts in Moroccan society through approaches that are beneficial to students.

Moroccan society, immersed in rich cultural traditions and experiencing rapid sociopolitical adjustments, provides a challenging context for analyzing gender dynamics. Traditional gender roles frequently intersect with modern objectives, resulting in a complex landscape in which educational institutions play an important role in molding societal standards. For instance, in many societies, girls are still frequently encouraged to pursue traditionally feminine occupations such as nursing or teaching, while boys are directed toward more traditionally masculine disciplines such as engineering or business. Still, schools and universities have the opportunity to challenge and reshape these gender norms as more women pursue careers in science and technology and more men enter caregiving professions. By investigating how educators perceive and navigate these interactions, this study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how educational practices may build inclusive settings and combat existing inequities. In these circumstances, this paper is addressing the following question: How does critical pedagogy influence perceptions and practices regarding gender norms and power dynamics among Moroccan educators in educational settings?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural standards, political pressures, and media representations significantly influence gender roles and power relations in Morocco. Scholars like Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji emphasize the crucial role of societal narratives in shaping and maintaining these

norms. Sadiqi, in particular, highlights how cultural narratives act as powerful agents, reinforcing stereotypes that affect both individual self-perception and broader societal ideals (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2014).

The cultural, political, and media scene in Morocco exhibits a complex interplay of tradition and modernity. Sadiqi contends that societal images are deeply rooted in cultural standards, resulting in a dynamic interplay between old values and current aspirations. Ennaji goes on to explain how these narratives reflect and influence other cultural narratives, shaping social ideas of gender roles and orientations (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2014).

These debates center on the cultural norms that govern Moroccan culture, which define unique positions and standards for men and women. These norms play an important part in gender inequality, influencing access to school, employment, and social status. Accordingly, cultural narratives frequently reinforce these norms, maintaining inequality and shaping society's attitudes about gender.

Culture, gender, and education (Best & Puzio, 2019) are inseparably connected, with cultural norms determining gender roles and impacting educational access and involvement (Fores, 2018). Traditional gender beliefs (Thamminaina, Kanungo, & Mohanty, 2020) frequently limit girls' educational chances (UNICEF, 2023), creating inequality. However, education has the potential to change these traditions by encouraging gender equality (Unterhalter, 2023; Rosen, Peralta, & Merrill, 2019; Zufiaurre, Pellejero Goni, & Weiner, 2010; Unterhalter, Longlands, & Peppin Vaughan, 2022) and empowerment. Gender-sensitive curricula and female role models in education motivate and encourage girls' goals. Furthermore, inclusive policies and community engagement are critical for fostering supportive educational settings. Addressing these intersections is critical for societal progress and meeting sustainable development goals such as gender equality and excellent education (UNICEF, 2021). Also, promoting equitable and inclusive societies requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates empathy for culture, gender awareness (Kent, 2020; Rosen et al., 2019), and educational innovation (Corbett, 1999).

Educational institutions emerge as critical forums for confronting and combating these dynamics (Markowska-Manista & Baranowski, 2024; Saikia & Das, 2024). Educators are responsible for encouraging critical engagement with cultural norms among Moroccan students, and more efforts should be made to allow individuals to interact critically with and critique societal stereotypes by including critical thinking (Markowska-Manista & Baranowski, 2024), media literacy, and inclusive education while fostering open debates, creative expression, and legislative changes to contest negative narratives. In this regard, many scholars share this perspective, emphasizing educators' critical responsibility in raising a generation capable of navigating and resisting gendered cultural myths.

As a significant societal influencer, the media plays an important role (Rosen et al., 2019) in shaping views on gender roles and power dynamics. It is crucial to add that media portrayals frequently embody and reinforce traditional gender norms, promoting prej-

udices that impact women's status and prospects in society. Media representations of women in Moroccan society usually emphasize conventional roles, restricting perceptions of women's skills and contributions to public life.

Critical pedagogy encourages gender equality and cultural diversity by questioning power relations and advocating for inclusive curricula incorporating multiple viewpoints. As a result, this strategy equips students to examine societal systems and challenge practices that perpetuate inequities critically. Critical pedagogy empowers students to recognize and oppose unfair practices (Baranowski, 2020) by incorporating gender-inclusive information and varied cultural views into the classroom (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Furthermore, media, which both reflects and develops society's beliefs (Sholle, 1994), is critical to this process; engaging with media portrayals enables students to identify and combat preconceptions (McLaren & McLaren, 1995).

Furthermore, examining media portrayals of women and minority groups promotes critical thinking (Hooks, 1994). Educators can also use media to showcase positive instances of gender equality and cultural inclusion, resulting in a fairer learning environment (Kellner & Share, 2009). This not only broadens students' educational experiences but also educates them to be engaged, informed citizens who advocate for equitable conditions in their surroundings (Freire, 1970).

Clifford Geertz (1973) and Dale F. Eickelman (1976) provide fundamental insights into Moroccan culture and society, whereas Zakia Salime (2011) investigates the contradiction between feminism and Islam in Morocco. Saba Mahmood (Johnson & Fairweather, 2017) explores the politics of piety and its impact on women's roles, whereas Judith Butler (Taciun, 1993) investigates the subversion of gender identities. Suad Joseph (1996) and Kumari Jayawardena (2016) provide perspectives on patriarchy and feminism in the Arab and Third World, respectively. Leila Ahmed (2021) offers a historical view on women and gender in Islam, while Katie Zoglin (2009) investigates the impact of Morocco's family code on gender equality.

Despite these insights, there is a research gap in how Moroccan educators understand and negotiate cultural, political, and media influences in classrooms. This study seeks to bridge this gap by delving into the varied perspectives of Moroccan teachers, putting light on their experiences and insights into how cultural, political, and media narratives influence gender dynamics and power structures. Understanding these perspectives is important for Moroccan educational procedures and regulations that promote gender equity. Sadiki, Ennaji, and others' work (Chentoufi et al., 2024; Mechouat, 2017; Barnett, 2024; Ouahid et al., 2023) serves as the foundation for this study, calling for holistic measures that empower both educators and students. This study contributes to broader efforts in Morocco to build inclusive and equitable learning settings that challenge and modify societal norms by strengthening educators' voices in the discourse on gender dynamics and power structures.

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## METHODOLOGY

The researchers conducted the interviews until the tenth interview when the data was saturated. At this point, the information supplied started to duplicate itself, and no new ideas emerged (Patton, 2002). This redundancy suggested that the fundamental themes and patterns had been thoroughly addressed, guaranteeing that the obtained data was comprehensive and accurately reflected different views.

The research employed In-depth interviews with ten educators as the primary research instrument to investigate how critical pedagogy influences perceptions and practices regarding gender norms and power dynamics among Moroccan educators in educational settings. Ten Moroccan teachers participated in the study, with each interview lasting one hour of interactive discussion. To ensure the reliability and credibility of the interview questions, a pilot study (Creswell & Poth, 2016) was conducted with two additional teachers who were not part of the main sample. This piloting process was crucial for several reasons.

Firstly, it helped to verify that the questions were clear and understandable, thus minimizing the risk of misinterpretation. Secondly, it provided an opportunity to refine any ambiguous or potentially leading questions, ensuring that the data collected would be both valid and reliable.

Furthermore, the pilot study allowed for identifying any unexpected concerns in the interview process, such as question flow or interview duration, which were then altered to improve the protocol's overall coherence and effectiveness. Feedback from pilot participants verified that the questions were relevant thorough, covering all areas of the research issue without generating misunderstanding or discomfort.

The pilot participants' responses showed a high level of reliability, implying that similar results may be expected in the main study. This previous phase ensured that the interviews provided significant and accurate insights into the educators' experiences and viewpoints, thereby improving the validity and dependability of the research findings. The researchers used SPSS to examine demographic questions, ensuring reliable and immediate statistical analysis. SPSS was chosen because of its strong data handling capabilities and wide range of statistical measurements, which allow for deep analysis and interpretation of demographic variables. This approach assures the findings are reliable and valid, adding to the study's overall rigor.

The researcher used thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2013) to analyze the interview data. This process consists of six steps: familiarizing with the data, coding significant features, collating codes into potential themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing a comprehensive report. This organized strategy ensured that the study was complete, transparent, and reliable, providing valuable insights into the impact of critical pedagogy on gender norms and power relations among

Moroccan educators.

Before diving into the participants' perspectives, it is critical to present a summary of the study's sample demographics, which include gender, age group, and educational background, as outlined below:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	5	50,0	50,0	50,0
	Male	5	50,0	50,0	100,0
	Total	10	100,0	100,0	

Table 1. Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30-40	7	70,0	70,0	70,0
	40-50	3	30,0	30,0	100,0
	Total	10	100,0	100,0	

Table 2. Age of Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Master's degree	3	30,0	30,0	30,0
	Doctoral degree	7	70,0	70,0	100,0
	Total	10	100,0	100,0	

Table 3. Educational background

The interview sample is gender balanced, with 50% female and 50% male participants (five respondents each), ensuring a range of opinions on critical pedagogy. Most of the participants (70%) are between the ages of 30 and 40, highlighting perspectives from educators at the peak of their careers, while 30% are between the ages of 40 and 50, providing a broader demographic viewpoint. Educational backgrounds demonstrate that 70% have doctorates, supplementing the study with deep academic perspectives, and 30% have master's degrees, which provide practical insights. This equitable distribution allows for a thorough investigation of how critical pedagogy changes views of gender norms and power relations among Moroccan educators, capturing both theoretical depth and practical significance.



## RESULTS

### Theme 1:

Potential data	Codes	Theme
Critical pedagogy empowers students to question the status quo while also providing an enjoyable experience for them to express their ideas.	Challenging the status quo, safe venue for dialogue, Student empowerment, critical reflection.	<i>Critical pedagogy for empowerment and societal engagement with gender</i>
Critical pedagogy supports students in developing critical thinking abilities by encouraging debates about societal issues such as gender equality and cultural diversity.	Thinking critically about social issues (gender equality, cultural diversity), feelings of compassion development, and inclusive learning environments.	
Project-based learning within sustainable development and equality in society.	Project-based learning and sustainable development Equity in society. Practical implementation, and involvement in the community.	

Table 4. Critical pedagogy for empowerment and societal engagement with gender

The participants' replies demonstrate a shared understanding of critical pedagogy as a tool for empowering and engaging students meaningfully. In this regard, one of the participants emphasized the importance of an inclusive and supportive learning environment in providing a safe space for students to question the status quo:

*Critical pedagogy, in my opinion, allows students to challenge the existing quo while creating a secure space to share their thoughts.* (Participant 3)

Based on this, the emphasis is on improving students' critical thinking skills through discussions on societal issues such as gender equality and cultural diversity. Encouraging pupils to consider diverse perspectives broadens their understanding and participation in these issues. This method improves their analytical skills and fosters empathy and knowledge of divergent views. As a result, pupils become more knowledgeable and engaged in societal interactions. A participant shared that,

*I use critical pedagogy to help students develop critical thinking skills by fostering discussions about social concerns such as gender equality and cultural diversity.* (Participant 8)

Critical pedagogy is important in current education because it promotes conversations on societal problems, such as equal opportunities for women and diversity of culture, allowing students to effectively assess multiple points of view. Concurrently, project-based learning may, to some extent, engage students in addressing real-world issues, such as protecting the environment and linking academic knowledge with practical benefits. These approaches seek to provide students with the skills and insights necessary to nav-

igate and interact meaningfully in an increasingly connected and complicated global society:

*My critical pedagogy involves project-based learning within sustainable development and equality in society.* (Participant 10)

These replies demonstrate a shift from creating an inclusive classroom environment to implementing practical uses of critical pedagogy that address gender equality, power dynamics, and broader societal concerns. This process demonstrates the intricate nature of critical pedagogy, which begins with creating a supportive environment and progresses to engaging students in critical conversations and hands-on projects that connect their learning to real-world societal concerns. This strategy not only encourages deeper student engagement but also allows them to critically assess and participate in promoting social change.

Critical pedagogy puts theoretical knowledge into practice by incorporating real-world applications such as talks about gender equality and power systems into classroom activities. It enables students to investigate and criticize current societal norms and injustices via collaborative projects and meaningful dialogue. This comprehensive approach provides students with the skills and confidence needed to tackle difficult social issues, resulting in an entire generation of engaged and socially conscious citizens capable of affecting meaningful change in the local area and beyond.

Theme 2:

Potential data	Codes	Theme
Gender disparities affect academic paths and aspirations.	Gender inequality, educational standards, and cultural prejudices	<i>Cultural Norms and Gender Roles in Moroccan Education</i>
Boys and girls are directed toward various academic routes, fostering prejudices.	Academic Separation, Gender Stereotypes, Educational prejudices	
Teachers help to preserve gender stereotypes in educational contexts.	Educator influence, gender roles, and social structures	

Table 5. Cultural Norms and Gender Roles in Moroccan Education

Gender inequalities in Moroccan schools influence academic paths and expectations. These biases, firmly embedded in society's standards, influence how teachers approach education and students' self-perceptions of their talents and potential employment opportunities. Boys and girls are frequently subjected to divergent expectations, with boys being driven toward science and math and girls into arts and humanities. This separation reinforces gender stereotypes and restricts students' pursuit of varied interests. Such prejudices might impede overall educational development by limiting opportunities and strengthening societal norms that determine educational and employment paths based on gender. Addressing these biases is critical for developing inclusive classrooms that



encourage equitable chances and allow all students to follow their interests freely. One of the participants addresses the persistent influence of gender norms in Moroccan schools, underlining their deeply rooted cultural frameworks. This context emphasizes how these positions emerge in educational contexts:

*Gender roles are highly established in our society, including the classroom. Teachers may unconsciously support these patterns, limiting the potential for both boys and girls in particular.* (Participant 1)

This acknowledgment emphasizes how societal standards persist mistakenly in educational settings, maintaining gender stereotypes that might limit students' possibilities for learning and employment. Educators inevitably contribute to this dynamic by promoting traditional roles and shaping students' perspectives and opportunities based on gender. These findings shed light on the complex interplay between Morocco's cultural norms, societal expectations, and educational techniques. They highlight the urgent need for educational reforms that promote diversity, actively challenge gender stereotypes, and allow students to follow their interests freely and equally. By addressing these concerns, educational institutions may create more fair and supportive learning environments that allow all students to reach their full potential, irrespective of gender.

### Theme 3:

Potential data	Codes	Theme
Education is critical for promoting gender equality and challenging cultural conventions.	Gender equality, critical thinking, social norms.	<i>Education for Gender Equity and Social Change</i>
Incorporating discussions about gender equity into the curriculum fosters critical knowledge of stereotypes.	Curriculum inclusiveness, thinking critically, gender stereotypes.	
Good representations and role models in education and the media have the potential to influence society's attitudes toward gender.	Media power, role models, and societal perceptions.	

Table 6. Education for Gender Equity and Social Change

Education in Moroccan society is essential not only for academic growth but also for creating societal standards and encouraging critical thinking among students. The themes discussed include the enormous impact of cultural norms and societal expectations on educational methods, particularly gender roles. Discussions have focused on issues such as inherent biases in classroom procedures and the need for inclusive educational reforms. Another emphasis has been on the role of critical pedagogy in fostering gender equity, encouraging students to confront stereotypes, and advocating for social change

in educational contexts. These themes highlight the transformative power of education in resolving gender inequities and creating inclusive spaces for learning in Moroccan education.

Participants overwhelmingly agree that education is essential in fostering gender equity and allowing students to question cultural norms in Moroccan culture. One participant emphasizes education's fundamental role:

*Education plays an essential part in advocating equality between men and women by equipping students with skills to challenge stereotypes in society and creating a setting where all feel valued and respected. (Participant 7)*

This highlights the necessity of creating inclusive educational environments in which empowerment and respect are universal. These themes highlight the transformative power of education in resolving gender inequities and creating inclusive learning environments in Moroccan schools.

Education is critical in changing society's views and equipping people to challenge long-held standards. Another participant believes that incorporating conversations about gender equity into the curriculum effectively raises students' critical understanding of gender stereotypes and societal standards. They claim that by including these talks in educational frameworks, educators may effectively raise a generation of critical thinkers capable of challenging and dismantling harmful preconceptions. Participant 2 says,

*Education can allow students to examine and break down gender preconceptions. We promote critical thinking about societal norms by incorporating gender equity into our curriculum.*

Some participants emphasize education's transformative power, highlighting the significance of both education and media in transforming society's views regarding gender. They underline those discussions regarding gender equity in educational settings, combined with positive media representations and excellent role models, which can significantly impact students' beliefs and behaviors. Participant 3 says,

*Education, along with positive media representations and strong role models, is critical to changing societal attitudes toward gender.*

These elements may inspire children to become advocates for change in their communities. This viewpoint highlights the enormous impact of education and media on future generations' views and behaviors, empowering students to be active agents in promoting gender equality and challenging established customs. Incorporating media into education emphasizes the necessity of holistic approaches to encouraging long-term societal change, in which formal education and media messages play an integral part in shaping inclusive viewpoints and behaviors among students. This comprehensive approach not only educates but also empowers young people to question and adjust established norms,

resulting in a more equal and accepting society broadly. Those ideas are summarized in the following mind map:



Figure 1. Critical pedagogy, media and Gender Norms in Moroccan Education

Source: Authors' own elaboration

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide insight into the convergence of critical pedagogy, gender norms, and power dynamics in Moroccan educational contexts. The study emphasizes how educators' beliefs and practices are influenced by their cultural, political, and media settings, consistent with prior literature. These findings are integrated into broader theoretical frameworks, answering the study question and providing practical consequences for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers.

Critical pedagogy, which emerged with Paulo Freire and has been developed by scholars

such as Henry Giroux, promotes critical engagement with societal narratives in order to promote equality and social justice (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2004). In Morocco, some educators use this paradigm to challenge established gender norms and power dynamics. The literature emphasizes the importance of cultural narratives in sustaining gender stereotypes (Sadiki, 2014; Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2014). This study reveals that educators see critical pedagogy as an effective technique for empowering students and encouraging critical thinking, allowing them to examine and challenge societal norms (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005).

The intersection of traditional beliefs and modern goals in Moroccan culture makes educators challenging. Media portrayals and school textbooks considerably impact society's ideas of gender roles, often reinforcing old norms (Sholle, 1994; McLaren & McLaren, 1995). Participants in this study pointed out how media representations influence students' self-perceptions and goals, supporting Sadiqi and Ennaji's claims regarding the media's function in preserving cultural narratives. This highlights the importance of educators critically engaging with media content in the classroom to combat these preconceptions (Hooks, 1994; Kellner & Share, 2009).

The major research question investigates how critical pedagogy shapes Moroccan educators' perceptions and practices around gender norms and power dynamics. The findings show that critical pedagogy creates a supportive climate in which students feel empowered to question the existing quo and engage in meaningful discussions regarding gender equality and cultural diversity. Educators reported employing project-based learning and inclusive curricula to address societal challenges, which improved students' critical thinking and empathy (Participants 8 and 10). These findings are consistent with the theoretical foundations of critical pedagogy, which advocate for the integration of varied viewpoints in order to achieve social change (Giroux, 2004).

In addition, the study found that traditional gender norms continue to impact educational practices and student goals in Morocco. Gender biases in classroom interactions and academic directions reduce chances for both boys and girls, perpetuating preconceptions (Participant 1). This confirms previous research highlighting the impact of cultural norms in affecting educational access and results (Thamminaina et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2023). Addressing these biases is critical to developing inclusive educational environments that promote gender parity and allow students to pursue their interests without restriction.

The findings indicate that education is critical for challenging cultural norms and fostering gender equity. Educators can encourage critical awareness in pupils by including discussions on gender stereotypes and cultural norms in the curriculum (Participant 2). This strategy not only improves students' analytical skills but also trains them to advocate for gender equality in their local areas. Education's transformative power, paired with positive media representations and role models, can substantially impact social at-

titudes toward gender (Participant 3).

Educators are at the heart of advancing gender equity and societal change. They must have the expertise and skills to effectively use critical pedagogy while creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Policymakers should support professional development initiatives that help educators improve their skills in this area. Curriculum designers should also include gender-inclusive content and varied cultural viewpoints to challenge stereotypes and promote equality (Corbett, 1999; Fores, 2018).

In a nutshell, this study emphasizes the role of critical pedagogy in reforming educational practices and fostering gender equity in Moroccan schools. The findings highlight the importance of a complete strategy that includes critical engagement with cultural and media narratives, inclusive curricula, and conducive learning settings. Policymakers, teachers, and curriculum designers must work together to develop educational frameworks that encourage students to question cultural conventions and advocate for gender equality. By doing so, individuals can help build inclusive and equitable societies that fit the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNICEF, 2021).

This thorough investigation gives a sophisticated understanding of how critical pedagogy might alter gender norms and power dynamics in Moroccan schools. This study's findings can inform future research and practice, ultimately contributing to larger efforts to achieve gender equality and social justice in education.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study investigated the use of critical pedagogy in Moroccan educational contexts, focusing on its impact on gender norms and power relations. While the outcomes highlight critical pedagogy's transformative potential for challenging old norms and fostering equity, a number of limitations should be addressed. The study's use of qualitative methods and small sample size of educators may restrict generalizability. Future studies should use larger, broader populations and mixed-method approaches to gain a better understanding. Integrating critical pedagogy into professional development programs and curricular frameworks is still vital. To preserve inclusive educational approaches, it is recommended that educators, policymakers, and communities develop networks of collaboration. By implementing these guidelines, Moroccan schools can create environments where students critically engage with gender norms, contributing to social change and advancing educational equity.

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