

# In Delhi's Bawana, This NGO Is Fighting Crime by Making Education Accessible

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Bawana Colony was a bare piece of land when the government resettled residents of the previous Yamuna Pushta, Shantimani, and other locations, in a staggered manner. Credit: Jignesh Mistry, CNES

analysis

## Education

While the region continues to experience a high level of crime, with frequent reports of drug abuse, theft, and kidnapping, the families in the region have been increasingly realising the importance of education.

Deepanshu Mohan, Ashika Thomas, Tavleen Kaur, Yashasvini Gupta and Ayush Shahi





“When I was studying in class 9 and 10, I never went anywhere except school and private tuition. I lived here (Bawana J.J. colony) but didn’t want to know or have a relation to this place,” said Shahida, who has lived in Bawana for 14 years but has virtually no memories of the place.

Despite multiple government schools present in her area, her parents enrolled her in a Kendriya Vidyalaya outside the colony.

Shahida now teaches class 9 at Navjyoti India Foundation, a non-governmental organisation, located in Block E of the colony. It is only after joining the NGO that she became aware of the happenings of the colony and the society she grew up in.

As a child, she was forbidden to talk to individuals aside from her family members. She wasn’t even allowed to talk to her neighbours.

When one visits this area at 9 am on any given day, with its bustling markets and crowded streets, there appears to be nothing to worry about, in terms of safety. However, this area is rampant with juvenile crimes, ranging from theft to intensive drug use.

Bawana colony was a bare piece of land when the government resettled residents of the Yamuna Pushta, Shantimani, and other locations, in a staggered manner. Their previous homes were demolished and many were forced to start anew, with little to no financial security. Shahida’s family was one among many who experienced this displacement.

Other residents reported the dire conditions of the colony in its initial stages, with frequent fires due to the haphazard construction of the settlement as well as the absence of basic amenities like water and sanitation.

Mahel, one of the first residents at Bawana, recalls, “It was a very difficult situation. We had no employment and no source of income. At that time, we didn’t think that our children would be able to get an education.”

Considering the recent 2022 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) report (analysed at length [here](#) and [here](#)), and its insights from urban and rural India, the research team from the [Visual Storyboard](#) initiative of the [Centre of New Economics Studies](#) (O.P. Jindal Global University) visited Bawana’s migrant colony to understand the educational landscape for the children and youngsters of low-income migrant workers who reside there.

Our team worked with [Navjyoti India Foundation](#) to identify their programmes’ interventions, teaching and learning methods, that are unique to the socio-economic conditions of the colony. Through ethnographic study-based interviews with

stakeholders, ranging from students, parents, teachers and alumni of the institution, we were able to observe interesting details about the children and the community at large.

Since 2004, the J.J. colony of Bawana near Narela has come a long way.

Starting from mere jhuggis, the colony now has buildings where the monthly rent is Rs 3,000. Today, the colony hosts a population of more than 1.25 lakh and has become a hub for re-settlers from various locations and for migrants who wish to work in Delhi. However, the region continues to experience a high level of crime, with frequent reports of drug abuse, theft, and kidnapping.



Bawana's J.J. colony near Narela has become a hub for re-settlers from various locations and for migrants who wish to work in Delhi. Photo: Jignesh Mistry, CNES

This trend of crime is not a consequence of the resettlement.

Navjyoti had been set up during the Yamuna Pushta days when the only objective of the foundation was to provide children up to five years of age with a space to collectively sit down and engage in any activity instead of dabbling in drug use. Some community members volunteered for the same.

These schools are called *galli* schools due to the children being taught on the road.

Navjyoti engages in programmes ranging from the remedial education system to Bal Gurukul, a peer learning programme initiated by the Foundation in 2015. It encourages students of the institute to teach other children in their locality and open sessions in parks.

### **The impact of peer learning programmes on students**

Janani, an alumna of Navjyoti, was very eager to speak to the CNES researchers in English. "I welcomed our funders and explained to them about the workings of the foundation," she said.

She had joined Navjyoti in class 7 after trying out several private tuitions.

She was integrated into the Bal Gurukul programme, a peer learning programme initiated by Navjyoti in 2015, within a few months after she had joined class 7.

Under this programme, students from higher grades teach younger children the concepts they studied in their class. The programme is almost entirely run by students, with the vice-chancellor, registrar and department heads selected among Navjyoti students between the ages of 16 and 18.

A common trend that emerged from our conversations with Navjyoti students was the transformative effect the Bal Gurukul programme had on their leadership and public speaking skills. It also strengthened their interest in education.

“From being a teacher at the Gurukul, I was promoted to the head of the IT department,” said Janani. This skill has helped her in her current job as an accountant at a factory near her home.

When Janani was in class 10, she was democratically elected as the registrar.

Several students also noted that the programme was effective in aiding in the revision of concepts that they had previously learnt.

Navjyoti has been effective in securing employment opportunities and scholarships for many students in the area. One of the residents noted that because of Navjyoti, two of her four children received a 100% scholarship to study in a medical college in Tamil Nadu.

Furthermore, a student said that due to Navjyoti’s tie-ups with VGS school in Rohini, she was able to secure a scholarship to study there after class 10. She could also attend summer camps.

The student noted that “this experience was very important for me, since it provided me with real-world exposure, and also helped me develop my interest in extracurricular activities, especially music.”

Navjyoti alumni noted that the organisations’ career guidance and skill upgradation programmes, as well as personal advice by many Navjyoti trainers, had shaped their career trajectory and aided in upward mobility.

[Also read: Reflections From a Project Tackling Learning Challenges in Assam’s Bodoland Region](#)

## **Crime perception**

The region is highly crime-prone as many cases of drug abuse, kidnapping, and prostitution have been reported in the community. Residents noted that interventions by NGOs have led to some amelioration in their living conditions, but the situation remains

dire. The high crime rate has led many parents to forbade their children from leaving their homes to go anywhere except school and tuition.

As many people lost work during the COVID-19 pandemic, the threat of crime increased, which poses safety risks for students.

Navjyoti teachers also noted that many people in the region are hesitant to send girls for higher education after attaining puberty due to safety concerns. Many students echoed this sentiment. They discussed the restrictions imposed on their movement by their parents because of safety issues.

Given the dangers that students face in their daily lives, it is not surprising that the majority of students expressed a desire to migrate to another city, after completing their school education.

Neethu Sharma, head of urban programmes, noted that “over time, the nature of crime has evolved in Bawana. Recently, we have seen a rise in kidnappings. There has been a rise in reports of missing children.”

Navjyoti differs from other NGOs in the region as it uses **education as a tool for crime prevention**. Dropping out of school and lower educational attainment are highly correlated with an increase in delinquency among children. The Navjyoti project thereby works on strengthening the importance of children in schools so that the chances of dropping out due to low learning levels and a decrease in interest in education are reduced considerably.

### **The education model of Navjyoti Foundation**

Navjyoti provides a holistic learning environment to its students. The two-hour classes start with collectively cleaning the classroom space, followed by storytelling and recapping previous material and learning the current topics. Based on the SSS model of ‘Shiksha, Sanskaar and Skills’, Navjyoti uses a blended learning system (especially post-COVID-19) and various teaching and learning methodologies to impart knowledge.

The government schools in the region have a student-teacher ratio of 60:1, whereas Navjyoti has a ratio of 30:1, making it easier for teachers to give individual attention to students. Homework is given after every class, as per the student’s skill level. “I ask my Navjyoti teachers doubts that my school teachers don’t clear. It is explained to me very effectively [by Navjyoti teachers],” Mithun, a class 12 student, told us.

Additionally, Navjyoti teachers also visit the families of students, and talk to their parents, who have been inconsistent in attending schools, to find the root cause of the problem.



In terms of specific learning outcomes, the team consulted both the teachers and the students to understand the latter's interest in education and confidence in English speaking skills.

Students from classes 11 and 12 who have been in Navjyoti for more than two years and even less than that reported an improvement in specific learning outcomes.

Apart from this, students reported an interest in extracurricular activities such as dancing, singing, playing guitar and learning computers. "I had set up a stall during the Navjyoti fair. I enjoyed engaging in that as it was new to me," said Savita, a class 11 student. Janani said, "I had participated in a singing competition during Saksham, our annual fest, and won the first certificate of my life."

According to the 2022 [ASER report's findings](#), there has been an increase in the number of children from classes 1 to 8 taking private tuitions. This corroborates our findings at Bawana as students reported going for private tuitions outside of Navjyoti, although the reasons in the case of Navjyoti students are different.

"Because of the distracting environment of this place, I don't want my child to be engaged in anything else. I want her to be busy so she goes to school, goes to Navjyoti, goes for tuition, Madrasa then home. I have forbidden her from going anywhere else," Munni, whose daughter studies in class 8, told us.

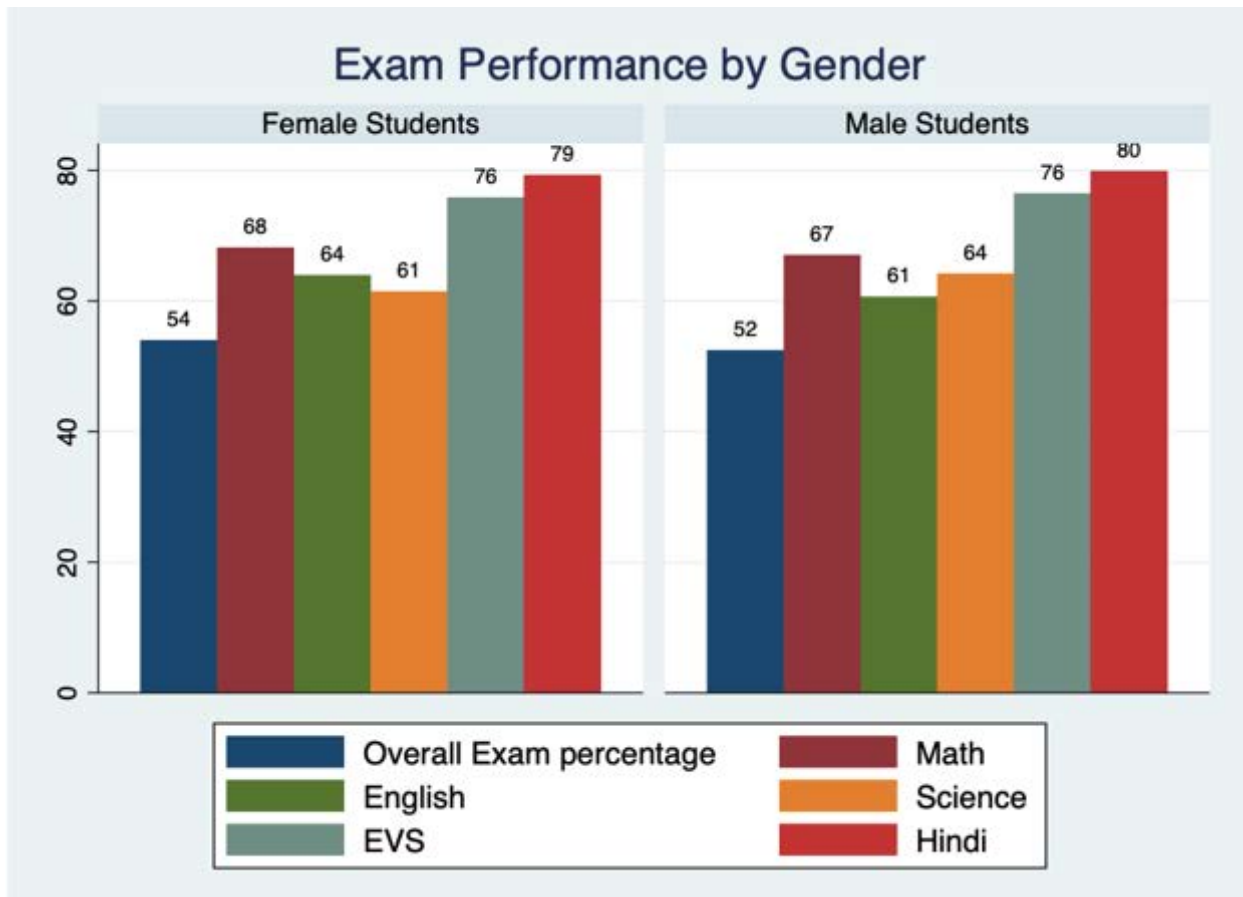
The teachers confirmed that verbal methods of teaching were the most fruitful way to teach children from classes 1 to 8. Written work was not always successful as children get distracted or submit incomplete work. Learning still happens only within the classroom space.

[Also read: ASER 2022: Mapping School Children on Reading, Arithmetic, Other Learning Abilities](#)

### **Learning outcomes**

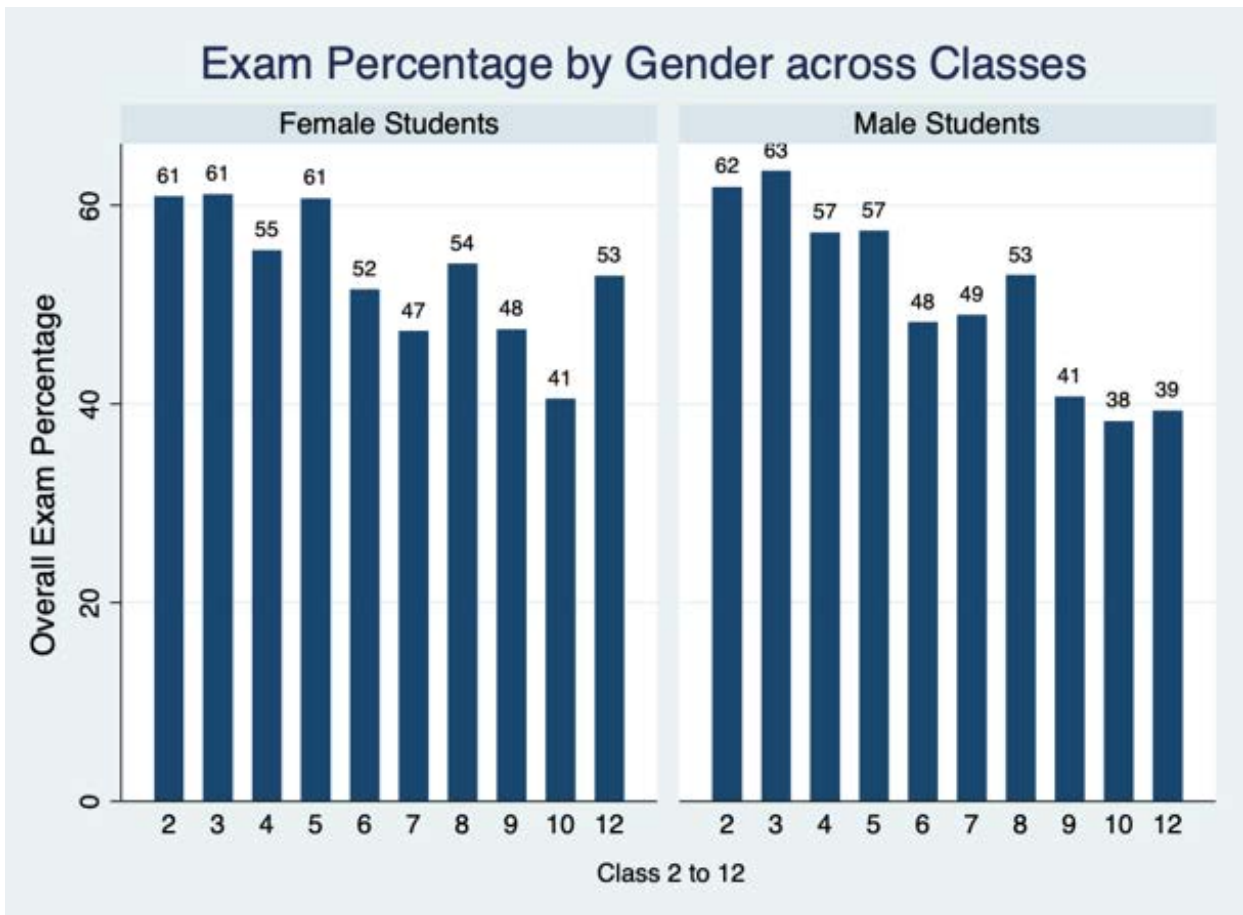
Assessment data from Navjyoti for the academic year 2022-2023 was analysed by the Visual Storyboards team to ascertain trends in learning outcomes for students. It was found that out of the total 553 students, girls outperformed boys, receiving a mean overall exam percentage of 54.48% compared to boys at 52.4%.

The graph below shows that girls outperformed boys in both English and Mathematics.



Source: Authors' calculations from primary sourced data

These trends were further disaggregated across classes.



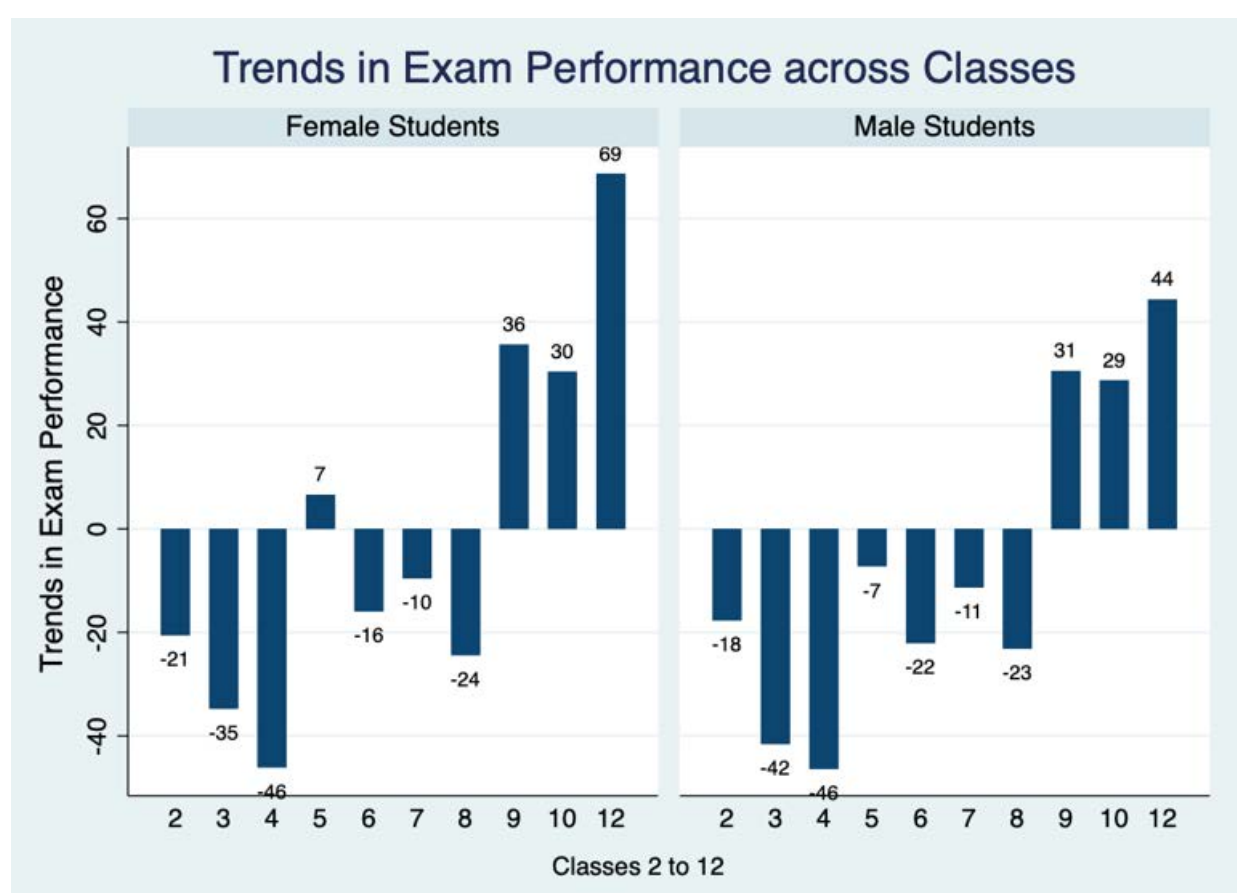
Source: Authors' calculations from primary sourced data.

## Trends in learning outcomes

It was found that there was a decline in the mean exam percentage by 6.3% from assessment 1 (August) to assessment 2 (December). This decline was much more pronounced for boys, who showed a mean decline in exam performance by 11.3%. For girls, this was only 1.9%.

These trends were further disaggregated across classes. There was a decline in exam performance for both girls and boys in classes 2 to 8. However, girls showed a minor improvement of 7% in class 5.

Meanwhile, there was an improvement in exam performance for students in classes 9 to 12.



Source: Authors' calculations from primary sourced data.

## The challenges students, especially girls, face in Bawana

Apart from the parameters of learning, there are several challenges which still pose a problem to the development of the Bawana colony. During the conversations with the alumni of Navjyoti and the current batch of students, the general consensus was a wish to leave Bawana after completing class 12. This is not surprising given the circumstances but it also indicates the hopelessness the residents feel when it comes to improving their living conditions.

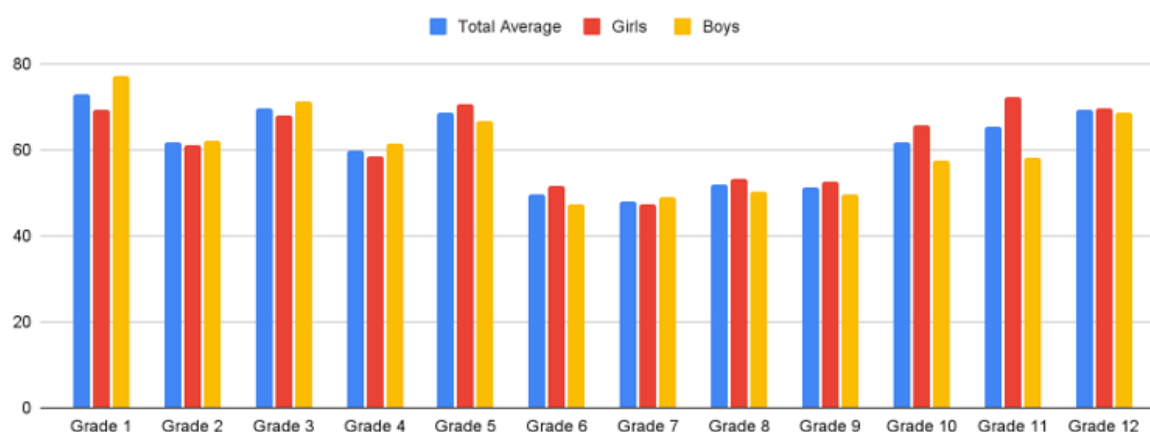


Despite students of Navjyoti reporting a nuanced perception of drug use, lower attendance has been reported among class 9 boys in the institution. “That is the time when they get distracted easily and tend to rebel. This trend is largely noticed in boys over girls,” reported a teacher at the institution.

Research found that after class 5, the attendance of boys falls as compared to girls. In addition, there is an overall drop in attendance from classes 6 to 9.

During the frequent follow-up visits by teachers to the houses of students, they found that the students were sent back to their native villages.

Attendance Averages across grades



Source: Authors’ calculations from primary sourced data.

Girls of any age at Bawana face a different set of challenges.

A parent, Sheila, when asked about her daughter’s dreams, said, “I have five daughters and no sons. With my meagre income, I am already struggling to get them basic education. I need to think about marrying each one of them off first before anything.”

When asked about the fee that Navjyoti takes and if they will continue to pay for education in case of a fee hike, she replied positively, “My wish is for them to have basic education. I will go to any end for it.” Under special circumstances, parents often request the organisation to offer them fee concessions.

In 2014, the organisation had reservations about naming the programme ‘Bal Gurukul’ due to the Sanskrit roots of the word, wondering if a more secular term would have been preferable, given the large Muslim population in the area. However, they noted that the term was well received in the community, and the programme has witnessed considerable participation by children from Muslim families.

While most respondents today echo a similar sentiment of secularism within the colony and the Navjyoti classroom, some mention a recent rise in tensions, especially around festival time. The fragmented political climate of the country at large seems to be finding its way over to these spaces as well.

The effects of resettlement are still being felt at Bawana even 19 years later and the families in the region have been increasingly realising the importance of education. Organisations like Navjyoti are helping to fulfil these requirements.

The findings from this assessment partly align with the ASER findings (as discussed by the CNES team earlier) and thus warrant attention to the improvement of communicative English and Mathematics. There are critical infrastructural needs of children, in terms of physical and human capital (teachers, staff, etc.) that will significantly help in improving the educational experience and learning outcomes of students in the area, which has remained largely ignored by the state.

*All names of respondents have been changed to protect their identities. All photo credits belong to Jignesh Mistry, CNES.*

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