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An assessment of teaching and learning methodology in Islamic studies

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Abstract

During the last century, there have been critiques targeted at methodology related to teaching and learning of Islamic studies, in particular towards the failure to effectively respond to the challenges brought by contemporary needs in this modern world. As a religion embraced by one fifth of the world's population, there is a real need for Islamic studies to re-vamp its methodology and approach in order to ensure its continuous relevance and as a response to the demands exerted by the globalization and presented by the modernity. Since the late 1970s, Islamic scholars have seriously discussed this failure and have suggested a multitude of action plans to address the weakness. This paper discusses various stands taken by Islamic scholars in this issue and suggests ways to improve the method of teaching and learning of Islamic studies.

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1. Introduction

Ideally, Islamic studies should be able to respond the challenges brought by the modernity at the level of theory and application. Therefore, teaching and learning Islamic studies should be developed as the relevant subject to cope the contemporary needs of the modern world in light of the principles as stated in al-Quran and al-Sunnah. Indeed, Islam should become part of global modernity and should be brought into line with the age. Proud with the glory of the past Islamic civilization but stagnancy with innovating new ideas at the practical level do not help Islam to be seen as the relevant subject in this modern world. Islamic studies have to retain all principles of Islam and to inspire all human beings on the ways to live in this modern world in coexistence and peace. Unfortunately, the current situation of the Muslim Ummah indicates the failure of Islamic studies to address these challenges comprehensively that leads Muslims linked to backwardness and stagnation.

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Scholars relate the failure of Islamic studies to the inability of Islamic education to nurture the critical thinking among students (Rosnani, 2005; Ramadan, 2004) that led Islamic education freeze and dormant; and failure to cope challenges of the contemporary world. Actually, to develop an appropriate method of teaching and learning the Islamic studies to solve the above failure has been voiced since the early in the past decade by some Muslim scholars such as Abduh (1905M) and al-Afghani (1897M). Since late 70s Muslim scholars have seriously discussed this failure and in 1977 a conference was held in Mecca to identify main problems and to give solutions. Although some resolutions of this conference have been implemented such as the formation of the International Islamic University of Malaysia; the situation of Muslim *Ummah* remains. This article is intended to discuss ways to enhance the method of teaching and learning Islamic studies.

2. Challenges in Islamic education

Basically, Islamic education was introduced to the pagans produced an overreaching civilization and culture. It pushed the Muslim society to the front challenging the political and economic superpowers of the day. It produced the scholars and scientists who contributed to the human society and to the welfare of the people. Specially, in the medieval period, the Islamic education was supreme and was the source of advanced discoveries in diverse field such as geometry, astronomy, geography, medicine, optics, and physics, plus comprehensive contributions in theosophy, philosophy, and encyclopedic compilations. According to Hilgendorf, (2003), there were at least 60 major centres of learning spanned the Islamic Empire from Baghdad and Isfahan in the East to Cordoba in the West that courted the wisest and most influential leaders of human knowledge.

The Spain in the medieval period was an Islamic cultural city with a number of educational institutions. The Cordoba University was at the peak of education. The Europe borrowed this educational heritage, its principles, methodologies and contents from these Muslim institutions. Al-Attas (1977) noted:

Muslim works on science, philosophy and other fields were translated into Latin, particularly from Spain and enriched the curriculum of the West. The Muslims passed to the experimental method of science. The system of Arabic notation and decimals was introduced to the West. their translated works, particularly those of men such as Avicenna in medicine, were used as texts in classes of higher education far into the middle of the 17th century. They stimulated European thought, reacquainted it with the Greek and other classical cultures and thus helped bring about the Renaissance. They preserved Greco Persian thought when Europe was intolerant of pagan cultures. European students in Muslim universities carried back new methods of teaching. They contributed knowledge of hospitals, sanitation and food to Europe.

However, Islamic education lost its appeal in this contemporary world. It could not produce people to face the challenges of the modern society. Rosnani Hashim (2005) discussed these challenges and inability of Islamic education, teaching methods and curriculum to produce scholars and students to face modern challenges. She described the Islamic education as 'lost its heart and mind' and was accused as producing militants and terrorism especially after 9/11.

Besides, she pointed out poverty, illiteracy, and educational accesses are some other challenges in the underdeveloped Muslim world. Furthermore, the economically developed and rich Muslim countries face social illness associated with modernization: hedonism, crime, drug addiction, deviant sexual lifestyles (e.g., homosexuality, lesbianism, adultery, and premarital sex), and the associated diseases (e.g., STD, HIV, and AIDS). Even abandoned newborns who were born out of wedlock have found their way into the social fabric of Muslim society. Islamic education became weak and failed to meet these challenges. It became paralysed in terms of answering the questions of modern man. Many reasons can be discussed for this situation. Reading the Quran without bringing the problems of today, sticking in classical methodologies to study the classical texts and the failure to agitate in Islamic thought are important among them. Rosnani Hashim (2005) urged for a rethinking of Islamic education considering the following fundamental questions: Has contemporary Islamic Education been able to produce students who can think critically or generate original and creative ideas? Has it been able to produce students who possess good hearts and live by Islamic values? Have Muslim youth been successfully educated and prepared to face the challenges of their time? What improvements are necessary in the teaching and curriculum of Islamic education for the twenty-first century?.

3. Phases of development in Islamic education.

The historical perspective of Islamic education will highlight this issue more clearly. The vision and objectives of Islamic education were maintained in the history through the communication between past (tradition) and innovation (modernity). The tradition helps to develop a stable identity while the modernity helps to develop flexibility. Niyozov and Memon (2011) illustrated the continuity and the changes in Islamic education; its missions, objectives and approaches have gone through five historical periods, namely; the revelation and the promise period, medieval period in which the building of Islamic education was built, colonial period in which Islamic education struggled to survive, post-colonial period where radical Islamization emerged, the period of Islamization in which various views on Islamization concepts came to exist and Islamic education after 2000.

The first period is the period of revelation that made the promise for Islamic education. As the Quran was not yet compiled, the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the source of knowledge. The residence of the prophet, the corner of the mosques (*suffas*) and the circle of learning (*halaqa*) were the learning sites. Justified the social transformation of the tribal culture, unified the Arabs under the banner of *Tawhid* and destroying the tribal racism, showing the differences and similarities between Islam and other religions and reconceptualising of the existing concepts and practices were the goal of education during this period (Niyozov & Memon, 2011). During the rule of Umar bin Khattab, swimming, horsemanship, famous Arab proverbs and poetry were included in the curriculum along with textual studies of the Quran and Hadith. Soon after the conquest of new lands, culture and educational centres, the Muslims adopted new sciences and departments in education. As the result, new disciplines around the Quran appeared such as grammar (*nahw*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

The second is the medieval Islamic period that was the period in which the Islamic education was built on the promises of revelation. The prominent learning centres such as Al-Qarawiyin in Morocco, Dar al-Hikmah and Al-Azhar in Egypt, Dar al-Ilm and Nizamiyyah in Iraq and Persia produced the knowledge during this period. There were two types of learning centres in this period; court learning and ordinary learning centres. The children of the elites and royal families were thought in courts with special teachers and others were in learning centres. The knowledge, during this period, was classified. For instance, al-Ghazzali classified the knowledge as the highest knowledge (the knowledge of God, understanding, explaining and applying such knowledge) and other knowledge. The scholars and intellectuals in this period, following the classification of al-Ghazzali, wrote notes and books. *Nazar*, *Munazara*, *Jadal* and *Mubahala* were the teaching methodologies while the student-teacher relationship was rewarded and punished.

The third is the colonial period that was the next historical phase of Islamic education. Surviving the challenges was the significance in this period. The challenges came from the west in the form of rationalism, humanism, nation-state, secularism and modernization. The Muslims elites in Iran, Turkey and other Muslim countries sent their children to the western countries for educating them in the administration and military in order to make sure their survival facing the challenges of colonialism. They established western style of schools leaving traditional learning centres. Hilgendorf (2003) described this situation highlighting the reason for the decline of Islamic education:

As the Islamic Empire began to break apart, the madrasas, which were supported by the ruling classes, became denominationally focused in their curriculum. Because the sciences produced a little economic gain, they began to fall out of favour and lost patronage and social support. As a result and in an attempt to continue the educational process, the madrasas fell on a stricter and more rigorous religious schooling that became an end unto itself (p.68).

According to him, the loss of state support primarily was the reason for the decline of Islamic education. Several denominational expansions came to exist due to the loss of rulers' patronage. Therefore, the Islamic scholars decided to close the door of *ijtihad* temporarily in order to save the people from the deviation. Hilgendorf (2003) explained it quoting from Mehmet;

The "Gate of Ijtihad" (knowledge based upon reasoning) was declared closed. The consensus of the teachers was that the Islamic way of life had been adequately delineated by previous scholarship. Henceforth there could be no justification for independent judgment or rational inquiry (p.69).

However, inability to stop the colonialism in the Muslim world through western based education system raised the question on the existing education system and values. Some of intellectuals found educational and cultural failure was the reason for colonization while others regarded it as a punishment of the God due to the unislamic way of life. The former suggested to accept the western education system through Islamic ethics and values to face the colonialism while later rejected it and highlighted the need for a call to return to pure and pristine Islam.

As the result of these differences in explaining the reason for colonialism, educational dualism appeared; traditional system of education through kuttab and madrasas continued while the establishment of the western style of modern schools, universities and university colleges. In the first, Islam is the centre and served as an overreaching epistemological and ethical framework while in the second, Islamic education became a subject or part of the text in language, history and social studies (Niyozov & Memon, 2011).

The dichotomy between traditional and modern education systems led to a gradual declining of traditional system. As the result, traditional system of education lost its appeal. The elites in the Muslim countries marginalized it and its centres.

The fourth is the post-colonial era (1940-1970) which represent the next phase of Islamic education, responded to this situation, in a type of accepting or rejecting of the western education system. For instance, Kamal Atatürk (1881-1936M) in Turkey and Hamidou Kane of Senegal marginalized the Islamic education and adopted western education completely. On the other hand, Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979) and Seyyed Qutb (1906-1966) rejected the western education completely (Andrew Rippin, 1990). Out of these controversies on adopting and adapting the western education, Islamization came to exist as the next phase of the Islamic education process. It is an alternative paradigmatic effort based on the premise that all knowledge can and need to be understood from within an Islamic worldview. The fifth phase of the Islamic education is the period of Islamization. This period is discussed in the next part.

4. Islamization of Islamic education

Two stands appeared among the Islamizers out of questions about what 'Islamic' in Islamic education. One group of Islamic scholars emphasized epistemological and ontological dimensions of knowledge and the other emphasized on ethical and pragmatic aspect. Both of these groups used the western critiques of its own education and society in order to show the problem in western education and to establish their project. They found the western secular education system lacks tools to understand the moral and spiritual realms; it reduces reality to its material; it demands neutral values which are impossible and it divides knowledge into fragments. Due to these reasons, they attributed the western education as violating the Islamic principles of *Tawhid* (Niyozov & Memon, 2011).

On the other hand, they highlighted the social failure and educational backwardness of the Muslim world by adopting the western education system. Al Attas and al-Faruqi said that western secular education has led to further decline of power, unity and cultural identity. However, Islamization project received challenges from it rejectionists after 1970. They described it as inability to engage with Muslim and non-Muslim diversity, plurality, and critical alternatives, as well as its inability to move beyond rhetoric, exposed its drawbacks. For instance, Tariq Ramadan (2004) described the Islamization project as:

With regard to Islamic teaching properly so called, there are some questions worth asking. By adding "Islamic" disciplines (e.g., learning the Qur'an and the traditions) and teaching them in the classical manner (that is to say, usually as it is done "there"), do we really give the pupils the tools they need to live here, pious, self-fulfilled, and aware of their responsibilities? After more than twenty years of experiment, it is well worth asking the question. A scattering of Islamic teachings, verses learned by heart, and values idealistically passed on do not necessarily forge a personality whose faith is deep, whose consciousness is alert, and whose mind is active and critical. It is no argument to quote school performance indicators in self-satisfaction: the "success" of an Islamic school cannot be measured by success on examinations (p.132).

Ramadan (2004) related the failure of the Islamization project to failure of classical teaching methodology in Islamic studies to develop the necessary ability to challenge the contemporary world. He highlighted failure of this project in Madrasas to bring out critical thinking, produce values and realize the problem of the society. Therefore, he questioned the worthiness of this project if the students who were educated could not meet the challenges of the

contemporary Muslim society. According to Niyozov and Memon (2011), the researches which were performed in Canada and United State on Madrasas proved disengagement of its graduates from the society. Therefore, they urged that Islamic studies have to be improved much to prepare the Muslim children to engage with, contribute to, and benefit from the world around them.

While, Rosnani (2005) in order to find out a system to reform the Islamic education discussed its goals and the objectives. She put it as follows:

The goal of Islamic education is to produce good people who will achieve ultimate happiness (*sa'adah*) in this world and the Hereafter. This ultimate happiness will be attained when all people become true servants (*'abd*) and vicegerents (*khalifah*) of Allah. As true servants, it is necessary for their own well-being to perform acts of worship (*'ibadah*) in the broadest sense to purify their souls and to perfect their character. As His vicegerents, they are obliged to preserve and safeguard the universe, which has been created for their sustenance and, more importantly, to spread the message of Islam (peace) through working for social justice. To achieve this task, people have been endowed with the faculty of the intellect (*'aql*), which distinguishes them from the other creatures. God Prophet Muhammad PBUH as the perfect person (*al-insan al-kamil*) who has great characters (*khuluq al-'azim*). The Hadith literature also relates that he was the living Qur'an. In onehadith, the Prophet PBUH emphasized that he came to perfect moral character (*akhlaq*). Therefore, Islamic education ought to strive to mould Muslim individuals who embody the Qur'an (p.137).

According to her, producing perfect moral character is one the objective of Islamic education. She criticized existing education system and the teachers who only concern on preparing the students for the exam rather than concerning internalization of Islamic values. They teach Islamic subjects also similar to other subjects emphasizing the cognitive domain. Therefore, the teachers' intention (*niyyah*) of teaching the subject has departed from its true aim. Making strong relationship between God and Man is another objective of Islamic education. However, according to Rosnani, Islamic education has failed to establish the bridge between God and His true servants (*'ibad al-Rahman*). With regard to the content of the curriculum, Rosnani indicated that the curriculum of Islamic studies should stimulate the mind and heart. However, Islamic studies today failed to touch the heart while developing the mind. She accused the students of Islamic studies very often recite and read the Quran thought they study it as a subject.

Rosnani's major concern is the methodology employed to teach Islamic studies. In the view of her, due to the weakness in the teaching Islamic education, youngsters in the Muslim society easily fall into the traps of western culture. She said:

The methodology of teaching the Islamic sciences is plagued with weaknesses and is, in fact, the greatest hindrance to developing wisdom and building Muslim students' character. In fact, this weakness probably explains why Muslim students or young people are easily swayed by those western cultures and values that contradict Islamic culture and values. This phenomenon reflects their fundamental weakness of character (p.140).

According to Rosnani, the students of Islamic studies have not been taught to think according to religious principles, how to weigh and judge circumstances, and how to think critically. In order to elaborate this point she brings a situation in a Saudi School in 2002 where the girls burnt up due to lack or critical thinking of the religious police (*Matawwa*). When the fire came out in the schools, they did not allow these girls to run away from the fire without hijab. She asks why he was so adamant. Is the *hijab* more important than a girl's life? A such sad situation came due to the lack of thinking in accordance with the situation and circumstances.

Another horrific teaching methodology in Islamic studies is emphasized harshness of Allah (*dhu intiqam*) than the mercy (*al-rahman*). Finally, she accused the teachers of Islamic education as not innovative and creative. They frequently employed the lecture or dictation/memorization method when delivering theory or facts, or demonstration and explaining ritual practices.

She recommends recruiting the teachers to teach Islamic science based on qualification and moral characters. They should be a role model to the students in thinking, worship and conducts. With regard to teaching methods, she suggested to emphasize the mercy of Allah rather than his punishment. It will create a love of Allah and closer them

to him. The teaching of moral or ethical reasoning is another suggest of Rosnani to improve the critical thinking of the students in order to avoid radicalism as *Mutawwa* did.

5. The models in Islamic Education: a survey

In this background, it could be useful to make a survey of existing models in teaching Islamic studies. In order to bring out the problems and the challenges of existing models in Islamic education, a conference was organized in Kuala Lumpur in July 2002. The number of scholars attended to this conference from different parts of the world including the United Kingdom, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Pakistan and the United States. The primary objective of the conference was to evaluate the role, direction and the potential of Islamic studies for promoting Islam as the best alternative for solving a problem in the contemporary world. (Abd Samat Musa, et al., 2004).

The scholars who participated in this conference surveyed the curriculum of Islamic studies, teaching methods and existing models in the universities in both Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries. The majority of them did not satisfy with the existing system of Islamic education. The main reason is the Islamic studies in these models are taught either in superficial and theoretical perspectives (Zaki Badawi, 2004) or isolated subjects from the modern educational (Muda, 2004; Siddek Baba, 2004). Zaki Badawi (2004) investigated the status of Islamic studies in British universities and institutions and highlighted the need of teaching Islamic studies to become committed Muslim and to develop their critical thinking rather than giving a superficial understanding of Islam. Muda (2004) investigated existing education models in Malaysia and found a kind of dualism which has cut off Islamic education from modern subjects. He stressed the need of teaching Islam with modern subjects in a way to strength Islamic commitment while enhancing employment opportunities.

The existing education models can be divided into three as Taha Jabir al-Alawani classified it in his book *Outlines of a Cultural Strategy*. According to him, there are three educational approaches, namely:

- a. The traditionalist approach: This approach considers the Ummah's traditionally thought to be self-sufficient and capable of being presented as it is or with very little alteration. This approach is described as the approach of authenticity;
- b. The modernist approach: This approach considers a systematic civilization cannot be built in the contemporary world without the Western thought and its worldview. The view is often described as modernistic;
- c. The eclectic approach: it is an approach accommodates traditional and modernist views on education. In which one must select from traditional thought what is most sound, and from 'modern' contemporary thought that which one considers and proves to be correct.

The majority of *Madrasas* where Islamic studies are taught on the basis of *fiqh*, represent a traditional approach of Islamic education. The curriculum in these schools is subject-centred; the method of study was traditional, primarily memorization. The students in these Madrasas studies revealed sciences such as recitation of the Qur'an, its exegesis; Sunnah and its traditional explanation; theology; jurisprudence; history of Islam including the Prophet Muhammad's biography; fundamentals of arithmetic and logic (Rosnani, 2005). These educational institutions had a common goal of producing virtuous Muslims who would obey the religious commandments. The study of Islam in these madrasas is traditional and not relevant to the contemporary world.

The schools and the universities which were established after the colonization representational modernist approach of Islamic education. The curriculum and teaching methodologies are essentially secular and Islam is taught in these institutions as a subject without deep analysis. Most Islamic subjects at these institutions are taught to satisfy education ministry requirements. Therefore, Islamic knowledge in these institutions also is not relevant to the contemporary world.

According to Sidek Baba (2004), the eclectic approach is unique and newly developed method of studying Islam. Taha Jabir Al-Alawani (1989) also suggested this method as a valid method to overcome the gap between traditionalist and modernist approaches of Islamic education. In this method, Islamic education is complemented with modern subjects. In the view of Sidek Baba, the educational objectives are achievable only through the integrating of both traditionalist and modernist approaches of education. He described that "it is important to integrate the two to form an intellectual structure that will provide the basis for achieving the required objectives" (p.) According to Sidek Baba (2004), many Islamic institutions and universities have adopted this method as their teaching method such as The Muslim Student's Association in USA (MSA), the International Institute of Islamic

Thought (IIIT), the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) and International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It reveals the successes of this method in applying to teach Islamic education.

Islam is the core of this system and conventional or western secular system of education is incorporated. International Islamic University Malaysia is the pioneer of this system and many other Malaysian universities also follow it now. In this system, “the curriculum is uniquely designed. In the law faculty of this university, Islamic laws are taught next to conventional laws. In the economics faculty, conventions and the Islamic economic systems are both taught to the students. In the education faculty, the Islamic educational philosophy, psychology and sociology are taught together with their conventional counterparts. All faculties in the university offered postgraduate programs leading to master and PhD and all are offering an integrated approach to their analyses and studies” (Noorani and Khairul, 2011: 116).

Sidek Baba (2004) evaluated the successes of this method in education philosophy with the active role of the graduates in the society. According to him, the role of such graduates would be comprehensive in approaching socioeconomic problem of the society. He said:

With the new theoretical foundation (epistemology) in Islamic education, human resource development in the Muslim world will be different. Muslim applying the electrical method can play positive roles in the process of nation building (p.61).

In light of that, Sidek Baba (2004) invited the educational institutions in the Muslim world to follow such method to produce scholars with a comprehensive Islamic background who would approach the socioeconomic problem of the society from an Islamic and modern perspective. Many Islamic institutions and universities in the Muslim world including Malaysian universities positively responded to such an invitation.

According to Noorani and Khairul (2011), it is successful method. She has measured it with increasing of acceptance of this system in Malaysian people. They said “More Muslim parents are convinced that an educational institution which covers both parameters of education in their content and environment are better options for their children to study. Interestingly, an institution such as the International Islamic University in Malaysia attracts non-Muslims to study and to work in the university.” (p.116). However, the success of this method cannot be determined with increasing number of the people to support. It needs a scientific research to evaluate the graduates and their Islamic background, their commitment to Islam and the demand for them in the job market not only in Malaysia but also outside Malaysia.

Sarfaroze and Nadeem (2011) introduced *tarbiyyah* project of Daud Tawhidi. The objective of this system is to produce Muslim students who can engage with the society, to make decision creatively and to face the challenges. In this project, Tawhidi emphasized the need of living practices through integrating Islamic ethos and spirit across both curricular and extra-curricular domains of Islamic education. It focuses on personality and character development, the real needs of the students, critical thinking and problem solving skills.

However, Islamic education, as Al-Zeera viewed is “essentially holistic, where: (i) learning takes place through various human faculties (e.g. mind, heart, and soul); (ii) knowledge domains are interconnected and united, serving non-contradictory human and divine purposes; and (iii) education should turn contradictions into complimentary realities.” It seems that the Tarbiyyah project is designed considering on the content but not the methodology. The teaching methodology is important equal to content or more than that.

6. Conclusion

Ideally, Islamic education is holistic where knowledge is produced by revelation and human experience, the knowledge could transform through various human faculties such as mind, heart and soul, the domain of knowledge are interconnected and produce Khalifah who might rule the world with justice and peace. Based on this holistic view of education, Islamic studies, its curriculum, transformation of knowledge and learning process should be determined. The existing models of teaching Islamic studies are supplemented with modern science teaching methods.

A scientific research is needed in order to measure the success of an eclectic approach in teaching Islamic studies which gives options the students to select a Major in Islamic studies and a minor in social sciences or other way. The lived practice method also is required a study to understand its practicality and the success. The modern educational

parameters to measure the success of teaching which is known as taxonomy can be applied to evaluate the success of knowledge, cognitive and affective domains. The development of soft skills also can be determined through taxonomy. However, spiritual and emotional developments are needed to be evaluated in their practical life and their commitment to Islam.

The improvement in Islamic studies needs to be updated with problem base system of teaching method. In which, the students, as Imam Abu Hanifah (699-767M), Imam Ghazzali (1058–1111M) and Ibnu Rushd (1126-1198M) practiced, are given an opportunity to face contemporary problem and find out the solution. For instance, the teaching of Hadith should not be theoretically and reading of the classical texts but also supplemented with contemporary rational and critical thinking. In order to do so, students will follow the following steps:

1. The student will be asked to understand the *hadith* without referring to the classical texts;
2. Then, he or she refer to classical text in order to understand the different method of understanding certain *hadith*;
3. Then he or she compares his understanding of *hadith* with traditional *ulama* and find out similarities and differences;
4. Then read about its implications in different historical settings;
5. Finally, come to a conclusion and put it into the contemporary world.

Reading *hadith* only from classical text will closed critical thinking domain and its implications in different historical condition. Therefore, the student will not know its implication in contemporary life. Thus, improvement in Islamic education should consider this supplement structure.

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