

SHIFTING THE PARADIGM: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES FOR FOSTERING LEARNER WELL-BEING

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Abstract

This critical review investigates how student well-being is becoming a central goal of modern education, resulting in a paradigm change. Education systems' long-standing emphasis on academic success has come under fire for allegedly ignoring students' emotional and social needs. This restricted concentration may have negative effects on students, including tension, anxiety, and a feeling of isolation. To comprehend the complex nature of student health, this critical review looks at a number of theoretical frameworks related to well-being in education, such as social emotional learning and self-determination theory. The drawbacks of conventional, exam-driven teaching methods are next examined; these methods frequently place a higher priority on rote memorisation, rivalry, and outside rewards. These methods may produce a stressful atmosphere that jeopardises the well-being of the students. The review evaluates the efficacy of new approaches meant to put learners' welfare first. Interventions based on mindfulness develop students' capacity for emotional regulation and awareness, which promotes a more peaceful classroom atmosphere. Project-based learning and other student-centred pedagogies provide students agency and encourage self-motivation and a sense of community. Studies indicate that these behaviours result in enhanced mental well-being, academic achievement, social competencies, motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy. Fostering resilient, well-rounded learners requires incorporating student welfare into the educational process. This study recommends that teachers should be properly trained and that classroom efforts are in line with more general school rules. More studies are required to improve and maximise these wellbeing-focused teaching practices in educational environments.

Key terms: Emerging educational practices, intrinsic motivation, learner well-being, paradigm shift, self-efficacy.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The paradigm shift in education towards integrating learner well-being as a core objective is a critical area of focus that has gained increasing attention in recent years (Thorburn, 2018). The traditional emphasis on academic achievement in educational systems has been scrutinised for neglecting the emotional and social well-being of learners (Slemp et al., 2017). This narrow focus can have detrimental consequences, potentially contributing to stress, anxiety, and a sense of alienation among learners (Oberle et al., 2016).

Historically, education has primarily been concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and the attainment of high academic scores, often at the expense of a more holistic approach to student development (Seligman & Adler, 2018; Weare, 2012). This singular focus on academic performance has led to the creation of high-pressure environments where learners are subjected to intense competition, rote memorisation, and external rewards (Skinner et al., 2022; Dodge et al., 2015). Such approaches can undermine student well-being, leading to unfavourable effects, such as poor mental health, disengagement, and a lack of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Oberle et al., 2016). In modern communities, testing is to control the educational system in a scientific and unbiased manner. Tests are one of the ways of evaluating learning and teaching efficacy. Testing exists to "(1) create or reinforce the identity of the state, (2) increase the sense of belonging to the state, (3) select and allocate individuals to roles or tasks that benefit the collective, and (4) introduce hyper-accountability to ensure uniformity and standardisation" (Glenn Fulcher, 2009). In the field of education, there is consensus that the testing process has an influence on both teaching and learning, which is termed "washback" in language education (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Qi Luxia, 2007). This influence may have a positive or negative impact depending on the context of the test (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011).

In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition that education should not only prioritise academic achievement but also nurture the overall well-being of learners (Reyes et al., 2012). Because of the interconnectedness of well-being and learning, implementing initiatives to increase learner well-being cannot be seen as merely adding to existing structures. Well-being for learning improves when shared understandings are fostered and when learner well-being is embedded into site improvement planning processes and self-review. A whole-site approach means supporting the well-being of all learners rather than just those learners identified as at risk. This means promoting democratic relationships and creating caring, safe and rich learning environments in which every young person feels safe to take the risks inherent in learning. When peer and staff/student relationships are good, and attention is paid to learner well-being and engagement, site attendance and behaviour issues improve. (Warren, et al., 2011). This change in perspective stems from the realisation that a learner's emotional, social, and psychological well-being is closely linked to academic success, engagement, and long-term flourishing (Thorburn, 2018). By integrating learner well-being as a core objective, Educational establishments can foster a more encouraging and all-encompassing educational setting that encourages the growth of well-rounded, resilient individuals (Seligman & Adler, 2018; Slemp et al., 2017).

An increasing corpus of research and theoretical frameworks that emphasise the incorporation of learner welfare into educational practices are highlighted by the literature review. One noteworthy example of this is social-Emotional Learning (SEL), which promotes the growth of fundamental abilities, including self-awareness, forming relationships, and problem-solving. Research has demonstrated a favourable

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correlation between SEL treatments and enhanced mental well-being, academic achievement, and social engagement in kids. In a similar vein, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) places emphasis on meeting fundamental psychological needs such as autonomy and competence, which in turn promotes learners' intrinsic motivation and general well-being.

Self-determination theory has become a highly influential theory of human motivation and well-being with a vast body of research evidence. It offers a blueprint for understanding the motivational basis of personality and social behaviour and the relation of basic psychological needs to well-being, psychological flourishing, and high quality of life. Diverging from most historical and contemporary approaches to human motivation that have treated motivation as a unitary concept – that is, one has more or less motivation – SDT instead has focused on varied forms of motivation (from autonomous to controlled motivation) to predict outcomes such as performance, engagement, vitality, and psychological health (Ryan et al., 2022).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary education is witnessing a transformative shift towards prioritising learner well-being alongside traditional academic objectives. The conventional emphasis solely on academic achievement within educational systems has been critiqued for overlooking the emotional and social welfare of students (Lohrmann, 2011; Facer & Selwyn, 2021). We need to look beyond learning as an intellectual exercise to learning that builds the emotional and social intelligence of our children. These are popularly touted as twenty-first-century skills: students' ability to think critically, be creative, collaborate, communicate, and be media and technology literate (Chang & Kidman, 2020). This scrutiny arises from concerns that such a narrow focus can lead to adverse outcomes, including increased worry, anxiety, and disconnection among learners. Today's learners bear a stress load that their predecessors may never have dreamed of. According to a preliminary study, college students cited academic pressure as a significant stressor, and it was determined that having in-person relationships with classmates and feeling like part of a group is crucial. Teachers must adopt new teaching strategies for today's students that consider their demands for academic success. Student's educational success needs (Landin, J. 2019).

A spectrum of theoretical frameworks underscores the integration of learner well-being into educational practices. Notable among these is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), which champions the development of crucial skills like self-awareness and relationship-building. The socialisation and education process is linked to personal, interpersonal, and problem-solving abilities and competencies and is known as problem-solving education (SEL). This process is impacted by a complex interaction of situational, cultural, and individual factors and occurs in formal and informal contexts. Besides a person-centred orientation, effective SEL interventions are delivered within a supportive learning context and are directed at improving the social-emotional and environmental factors that influence learning. (Li, et al., 2023; Reicher, 2010). SEL interventions have demonstrated positive correlations with improved mental health, academic performance, and social engagement among students. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasises fulfilling basic psychological needs like autonomy and competence, fostering intrinsic motivation and overall well-being in learners. This idea is actively applied in creating training programs and research on digital learning. It significantly aids in predicting students' academic progress, resolving the issue of ongoing digital learning and motivation, and inspiring educators to employ digital resources (Salikhova et al., 2020).

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Traditional, exam-centric educational models have increasingly come under fire for their myopic focus on academic outcomes at the expense of student well-being. These approaches often foster environments characterised by intense competition, memorisation, and extrinsic rewards, which can erode student morale and exacerbate mental health challenges. Exam-centric education causes extreme stress for students, and it downplays the ultimate purpose of education: critical thinking. Singapore's education system is known for being examination-oriented. An examination-oriented education focused on exams limits a student's capacity to learn through the best methods for them. Students are overburdened with homework on a daily basis that exceeds their normal capacities to memorise, allowing them to recite knowledge but lacking the intellectual depth to synthesise or appreciate abstract concepts. Students spend years of continuous memorisation and writing preparing for the examinations. This approach stifles students' imagination, creativity, sense of self, etc. These subsequently make teachers adopt conventional approaches, which will make learners excel in examinations at the expense of quality education. Thus, the exam-oriented model led to inefficiencies in education. In the present paper, we have theoretically analysed the effect of examination-oriented teaching on mathematics-quality education (Yadav et al., 2024). A specific issue related to modern reform was the construct that the focus on the whole child was disappearing as educators focused solely on the cognitive aspects of their students (Knight, 2021).

In response to these limitations, innovative approaches prioritising learner well-being have emerged. These include the integration of SEL programs, mindfulness interventions, and student-centred pedagogies like project-based learning. Policies and procedures about the SEL curriculum must consider the needs and histories of the kids, families, and communities they work with to effectively administer and support SEL programs within varied and multicultural settings (Hayashi et al., 2022). SEL equips students with critical lifestyle talents, which include self-cognisance, self-law, empathy and relationship constructing, which might be foundational to growing resilience. By incorporating SEL into classroom activities and discussions, educators can help students expand a deeper understanding of their feelings, beautify their interpersonal competencies and build the resilience to navigate the complexities of the present-day international (Adeoye, 2024). Studies show these behaviours have positive benefits, including improved mental health, academic achievement, student motivation, and self-efficacy.

Academic success, mental health, and school engagement can benefit from fostering and recording a student's proficiency in social and emotional learning fundamentals. Schools can play a crucial role in allowing pupils to develop greater social and emotional awareness through positive learning techniques that support students' well-being and positive mental health in the classroom (Grove & Laletas, 2020). The SEL leadership team is charged with identifying ways to integrate SEL into all aspects of the school's functioning and to cultivate a culture that fosters SEL in both students and staff. There are several strategies to accomplish this, but two common ones are implementing school-wide SEL principles and providing staff professional development. Both a positive school climate and high-quality SEL program implementation have the potential to improve students' social, emotional, behavioural, and academic functioning. The former creates an environment that provides staff and students with opportunities to learn, practice, and gain recognition for demonstrating competence, and the latter maximises the impact of evidence-based SEL programs designed to improve students' social and emotional (SE) competencies (Osher & Berg, 2017).

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Despite the promise of these practices, challenges persist, such as ensuring adequate teacher training and aligning classroom initiatives with broader school policies. How to promote social-emotional learning (SEL) at school depends largely on teachers. The majority of educators carry out particular activities. However, they need help to include SEL in the core curriculum (Ferreira et al., 2020). There is overwhelming evidence that teachers make a difference in learner well-being, engagement and learning achievement (Hattie, 2003). When we consider the variance in student achievement, whilst students' abilities account for 50 per cent, and home and school together account for 10–20 per cent, Teachers are responsible for approximately 30% of variations in learning outcomes (Warren et al., 2011). The relationship between equity and SEL is not always evident, despite the widespread belief that SEL is well-positioned to contribute to developing learning environments where students of all races, ethnicities, identities, and origins feel secure, respected, and empowered. Furthermore, there is currently no clear definition of what equitable SEL is in the classroom or what makes equitable SEL, even though well-established, research-grounded approaches in other sectors can be drawn upon (Ramirez et al., 2021). Further research is necessary to refine implementation strategies and assess long-term impacts, especially across diverse educational settings.

In conclusion, the critical review underscores the imperative for a paradigm shift in education towards prioritising learner well-being. These conditions require aligned policies, resources, and actions at state and district levels that encourage local schools and communities to build the personal and professional capacities of adults to: implement and continuously improve evidence-based programs and practices; create an inclusive culture that fosters caring relationships and youth voice, agency, and character; and support coordinated school-family-community partnerships to enhance student development (Mahoney, et al., 2021). By embracing emerging practices that nurture the holistic development of students, educational institutions can cultivate resilient people who are more qualified to handle the complexity of the 21st century. This transition necessitates a reassessment of conventional academic procedures and a renewed willpower to foster the highbrow development of younger individuals, allowing them to excel in a regularly dynamic global. Moreover, it'll remove darkness from the urgent requirement to provide students with the critical capabilities of discerning analysis, originality, flexibility and tenacity that are fundamental for achieving triumph in an ambiguous and hastily evolving society (Adeoye, 2024).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

To compile and evaluate the body of research on the incorporation of learner welfare into modern education, this study used a desktop research methodology. Through academic databases, institutional archives, and reliable internet sources, scholarly articles, books and reports are systematically explored and synthesized as part of this method. A thorough search was performed on several databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, PubMed, and ERIC. To find a wide range of viewpoints and insights, the search approach includes both grey and peer-reviewed academic literature. The articles and documents that are found after the first search are subjected to a stringent screening procedure that is determined by predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Relevance to the research topic, timely publication, and the reliability of the source are given great priority in the inclusion criteria. Unrelated subjects, duplicate publications, and non-peer-reviewed sources are all included in the exclusion criteria. After that, the chosen literature is thoroughly analysed and synthesised. Important themes, theoretical frameworks, empirical data, and methodological approaches are recognised and arranged to create a compelling narrative. Comparing and contrasting various points of view, spotting patterns and trends, and critically

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assessing the calibre and applicability of the literature are all part of the synthesis process. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn from the reviewed literature are compiled to guide the study's suggestions and discussion, advancing our understanding of the paradigm shift that has occurred in favour of putting learner wellness first in the classroom. This methodology describes the systematic process used to compile the body of existing literature on the subject of interest and perform desktop research.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student welfare is being prioritised alongside traditional academic aims in the revolutionary shift that modern education is going through. Institutions of higher learning have faced criticism for their historical emphasis on academic achievement alone, which ignores the emotional and social needs of their students.

Theoretical Frameworks Surrounding Well-being in Education

The numerous theoretical frameworks that support the incorporation of learner welfare into educational practices are examined in this critical analysis. These frameworks offer a strong basis for comprehending the complexity of student health and the significance of addressing it in the context of education.

One such framework is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), which emphasises the development of skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2011). SEL programs aim to equip learners with the instruments and techniques required to traverse the emotional and social challenges they may encounter in and out of the classroom (Reyes et al., 2012). Research has shown that the implementation of SEL interventions in schools can lead to improvements in mental health, academic performance, social skills, engagement, and self-efficacy (Gueldner et al., 2020; Durlak et al., 2011).

Another relevant framework is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that the fulfilment of three basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – is essential for the development of intrinsic motivation and overall well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2020). Student-centered pedagogies, such as project-based learning, can foster these basic needs by empowering learners, promoting a sense of agency, and facilitating meaningful connections with their peers and teachers (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Rahmawati et al., 2020). A student-centered environment is one that focuses on the student engaging with, absorbing, and retaining material while developing autonomous learning in a continuous process that involves both the teacher and student in reassessing learning goals (Riggs, 2020; Krahenbuhl, 2016). This is in contrast to a teacher-centered environment, which focuses on the teacher delivering direct instruction and following fixed learning goals. Student-centered learning has been deemed a best ten practice or approach for teaching and learning in the 21st century, according to global educational initiatives

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led by the World Economic Forum, the United Nations, and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (Benfaida, 2023).

Mindfulness-based interventions in education also play a crucial role in promoting learner well-being. These practices cultivate students' ability to be present, control their feelings and keep a composed, concentrated mental state (Browning & Romer, 2020; Weare, 2012). Research indicates that incorporating mindfulness into educational settings can lead to improvements in areas such as attention, stress reduction, and emotional regulation (Browning & Romer, 2020).

Limitations of Traditional, Exam-Driven Educational Approaches

The traditional, exam-driven educational approaches that have long dominated many educational systems have been increasingly criticised for their narrow focus on academic achievement and their detrimental impact on learner well-being (Skinner et al., 2022; Dodge et al., 2015). These approaches often prioritise rote memorisation, competition, and external rewards, creating a high-pressure environment that can be particularly challenging for vulnerable or marginalised students (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Oberle et al., 2016). An exam-oriented education system not only increases a student's burden but also limits a student's capacity to study through the methods that that specific student finds most useful (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011).

Research has shown that such exam-driven approaches can have a range of negative consequences for learners. These include increased stress and anxiety, a diminished sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation, and a perceived lack of relevance or personal meaning in the learning process (Slemp et al., 2017). Students are overburdened with homework on a daily basis that exceeds their standard capacities to memorise, oftentimes allowing students to recite knowledge but needing more intellectual depth to synthesise or value intangible ideas. They then resort to cheating, widespread in secondary schools, colleges, and society at large, to pass tests (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011). Additionally, the emphasis on standardised testing and external performance indicators can lead to a narrowing of the curriculum, with less emphasis placed on the development of critical thinking, creativity, and other essential skills for lifelong learning and success (Skinner et al., 2022; Weare, 2012).

Many educators believe that high school is where the culture of cheating first emerges since there is fierce competition for admission to the best universities in the nation, and scoring well on standardised tests is the primary requirement. Why there are so many high school students cheating? Because of the nature of the competitive educational system, which demands high test scores above everything else. Students worry about low performance, so they try to reduce the possibility of failing a test by lying during exams. Second, some students desire to pass the test with little or no study time. In both cases, the psychological pressure caused by the evaluation process constitutes the primary drawback of exam-oriented education. Too many tests give students not having the time to process the information, so they cheat to get away with it and

score just as well as the others. Success breeds success, especially when deception is involved (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011).

Emerging Practices Designed to Prioritise Learner Well-being

In response to the limitations of traditional, exam-driven educational approaches, there has been a growing emphasis on the development and implementation of practices designed to prioritise learner well-being (Thorburn, 2018). These innovative practices seek to create a more nourishing and encouraging educational setting that promotes the overall development of the learner.

One such approach is the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs into the curriculum. These programs equip students with essential skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2011; Reyes et al., 2012). Studies have shown that the implementation of SEL interventions in schools can lead to improvements in mental health, academic performance, social skills, engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy.

Mindfulness-based interventions in educational settings have also gained traction as a means of promoting learner well-being. These practices involve teaching students techniques to cultivate present-moment awareness, emotional regulation, and stress management (Browning & Romer, 2020). Research indicates that incorporating mindfulness into the classroom can enhance focus, attentiveness, and emotional resilience (Weare, 2012). Educators should pay more attention to the teenager's general harmonic growth, which can only occur when the education system is gradually opened as the primary reform basis. Establishing pilot programs and managing them in a non-bureaucratic way creates healthy competitiveness and encourages traditional school reform. This will lead to rivalry between the educational institutions. It will enhance their overall quality and performance, as it has been successful in various sectors (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the adoption of student-centred pedagogies, such as project-based learning, has been identified as a promising approach to fostering learner well-being. These pedagogies empower students by allowing them to actively participate in their education, investigate their passions and cultivate a feeling of control over their learning process (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Rahmawati et al., 2020). Studies suggest that these practices can lead to increased intrinsic motivation, engagement, and a stronger sense of belonging within the learning community (Thorburn, 2018; Rahmawati et al., 2020).

The conventional emphasis in educational systems on academic performance has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years, with a growing recognition of the importance of learner well-being (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013; Durlak et al., 2011). Researchers have identified various theoretical frameworks that highlight the multifaceted nature of student health, including social-emotional learning (SEL) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Elias & Moceris, 2012).

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Studies have found that traditional, exam-driven educational approaches, which prioritise rote memorisation, competition, and external rewards, can create a high-pressure environment that undermines student well-being (Dweck, 2015; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This is a filtering process that selects a few for higher education. Exam-centric, in a more general sense, refers to a system that regulates what pupils know and do not know. As such, it can occasionally appear as an oppressive force. In one's academic and social life. Exam-focused education minimises the importance of critical thinking, which is the ultimate goal of education. Exam-centric education determines a student's aptitude only based on test results, which frequently results in lower-performing students' marginalisation if not outright disregard (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011). This narrow focus on academic achievement can result in elevated tension, worry, and alienation among learners (Gallup, 2019; Twenge, 2017). According to the study, modest academic pressure combined with deemphasising high-stakes exams enhances student achievement and psychological well-being, improving motivation and productive adulthood (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011).

In response to these concerns, a growing body of research has examined the effectiveness of emerging practices designed to prioritise learner well-being. Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, for example, have been shown to equip students with essential skills such as self-awareness, self-management, and relationship building, leading to improvements in mental health, academic performance, social skills, engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy (Durlak et al., 2011; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

Mindfulness interventions have also been found to cultivate students' ability to be present and manage emotions, fostering a calmer learning environment (Zenner et al., 2014; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Additionally, student-centred pedagogies, such as project-based learning, have been associated with increased intrinsic motivation and a sense of belonging among learners (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Reeve, 2012). The Ministry of Education should focus on establishing sensible rules and overseeing performance and efficacy. In other words, it must not interfere any more with anything other than the operations of the entire education system. This will change the current "standard answer-style" approach and introduce more possibilities for students' overall growth, which will benefit teachers and students in several ways—recognising special, individual talents and creativity (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011).

While challenges remain, such as ensuring teacher training and alignment between classroom initiatives and broader school policies, these innovative practices hold significant promise for integrating learner well-being into educational settings (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Further research is needed to refine and optimise these wellbeing-focused strategies. Still, the potential benefits are clear: this paradigm shift in education has the

capacity to cultivate not only academically successful individuals but also thriving learners who are prepared for future success (Seligman et al., 2009; Durlak et al., 2011).

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The critical review highlights the crucial need for a paradigm shift in education to prioritise learner well-being as a core objective. The traditional focus on academic achievement has neglected the multifaceted nature of student health, leading to detrimental consequences. Emerging practices, such as social-emotional learning, mindfulness interventions, and student-centred pedagogies, have demonstrated positive outcomes and hold significant promise for nurturing well-rounded, resilient learners. Thus, to support the adoption of research-based practices and initiatives that promote inclusive school environments, adolescent voice, and caring connections, aligned policies, resources, and actions are required at the state and local levels. Through the adoption of new approaches that support students' overall growth, schools can build resilient people who are better able to deal with the challenges of the 21st century.

Recommendations: While the integration of learner well-being into educational practices holds significant promise, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. Ensuring that educators have sufficient training and assistance in the implementation of wellbeing-focused strategies is a crucial concern. Additionally, aligning classroom-based initiatives with broader school policies and culture is necessary to build a unified, sustainable approach to promoting student well-being. Further research is needed to refine and optimise the delivery of wellbeing-focused strategies within diverse educational settings. This includes exploring the long-term impacts of these practices, identifying the most effective implementation approaches, and addressing the unique needs of different student populations. Ultimately, the paradigm shift towards integrating learner well-being into education has the potential to cultivate not only academically successful individuals but also thriving learners who are prepared for future success. By nurturing the whole child and addressing their emotional, social, and psychological needs, educational institutions can encourage the growth of robust, well-rounded people who are equipped to navigate the challenges of the 21st century.

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