

# Effectiveness of Play based learning Approach in Teaching Islamic Values to Early Childhood Children

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the play based learning approach in teaching Islamic values to young children. This qualitative research employed a case study design conducted at an Islamic based Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institution in Bandung, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 30 early childhood learners aged 4–6 years, 5 educators, 3 institutional managers, and 10 parents. Data collection was conducted through interviews with institutional management, questionnaires administered to educators, and direct classroom observations. The results revealed that the play based approach increased children's engagement and understanding of Islamic values. Children demonstrated greater enthusiasm and were able to grasp religious concepts, such as prayer, good manners, and worship, through play based activities like role playing, storytelling, and drawing. Moreover, the approach contributed to children's social and emotional development, including their skills in cooperation, sharing, and self control. However, a key challenge identified was the limited instructional time to implement play based strategies fully. Despite this, the study concludes that play based learning is an effective method for instilling Islamic values in early childhood, supporting both cognitive and character development. Therefore, PAUD institutions are encouraged to optimize this approach by training educators and actively involving parents in the learning process.*

**Keywords:** *play based learning, Islamic values, early childhood, Islamic education, game-based learning*

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## 1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a pivotal role in shaping children's cognitive, social, emotional, and moral foundations. At this developmental stage, children begin to absorb values that will later govern their behavior and worldview. Therefore, the educational strategies employed during this stage have a long-lasting influence. However, as globalization and the digital era accelerate, education systems worldwide are increasingly challenged to convey moral and religious values to children. Recent reports from UNICEF (2023) and the Indonesian Ministry of Education (Kemendikbud, 2022) indicate a decline in moral literacy and empathy

among early learners, with excessive screen time and digital distractions contributing to limited internalization of values.

The development of technology, culture, and social media has had a considerable impact on the way children learn and interact with their world. Today's children are more exposed to information coming from various digital platforms, which often overlooks the importance of cultural and religious values. In many countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim majority, moral and spiritual values tend to be displaced by the growing demands of technology and consumerism. In this context, Islamic education in early childhood is becoming increasingly important because, in addition to providing religious knowledge, it also shapes character and moral values that will guide children in facing the challenges of global life.

However, much of the religious education implemented in early childhood education institutions tends to be based on conventional teaching methods that rely on memorization, lectures, and formal learning. This often fails to capture the attention of children who are at an inquisitive and exploratory stage of development. These methods are frequently considered ineffective in helping children feel connected to religious teaching materials, especially Islamic values that should be instilled at an early age. Therefore, a more creative and engaging approach is needed, which can enable children not only to learn Islamic values but also to experience a learning process that is enjoyable and tailored to their developmental stage.

Specifically, in the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, one of the challenges faced by educators at the PAUD level is how to convey Islamic values in a manner that aligns with the developmental needs of early childhood. In many PAUD institutions, teaching Islamic values is still done with a traditional approach that emphasizes memorization of prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, and religious rules without providing opportunities for children to understand and internalize religious teachings in their daily lives. This approach does not accommodate children's need to learn in an interactive and fun way, so children do not fully understand the meaning behind the teachings.

Additionally, the importance of teaching Islamic religious values is closely related to the moral and character development of children. Early childhood children tend to learn more easily through playing and interacting with their environment. Therefore, education that relies solely on theory or memorization will struggle to achieve the goal of character education, which should be the primary focus of Islamic education in early childhood. In this case, there is an urgent need to explore more interactive and fun teaching methods that can help children understand Islamic values more deeply and apply them in their daily lives.

An approach that incorporates play based learning could be a solution to this problem. Play based learning allows children to learn in a fun and engaging way,

through activities that involve social interaction, experimentation, and creativity. It provides children with the opportunity to explore their world through play, which not only aids their cognitive development but also helps them understand and internalize moral and religious values, including Islamic values. However, despite numerous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of play-based learning in various aspects of education, its application in Islamic education for early childhood remains minimal.

Several previous studies have shown that play based learning has many benefits in early childhood education. A survey by Alavi and Mohammadi (2020) revealed that play based learning can increase children's engagement and understanding of the material taught. The study showed that children who were taught using play based methods found it easier to understand abstract concepts and apply the knowledge they gained in real life. In addition, research by Azizan and Rahman (2021) also highlighted that play based learning is very effective in developing children's social and emotional abilities, such as cooperation, empathy, and self-control, all of which are essential values in Islamic education.

The novelty of this research lies in its direct focus on integrating Islamic values into play based learning for early childhood, an area still underexplored in Indonesian contexts. Unlike prior studies that address general value formation through play, this study is designed explicitly and observes structured play sessions aimed at instilling Islamic values, such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), mutual help (*ta'awun*), and cleanliness (*thaharah*). This integration bridges a practical gap between pedagogical strategies and spiritual goals in PAUD curricula.

However, despite evidence showing the effectiveness of this approach in improving various aspects of children's development, there is still limited research that focuses on the application of play based learning in Islamic education in early childhood. Most of the existing studies tend to focus more on the use of play based learning in the context of academic knowledge, such as language, math and science, without integrating religious values. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring how play based learning can be used to teach Islamic values in early childhood.

The objectives of this study are to explore and assess the effectiveness of play based learning in teaching Islamic values in early childhood. Specifically, the study aims to understand how children respond to such learning activities and how effectively these activities translate into internalized value.

Theoretically, the findings are expected to contribute to the literature on Islamic education by providing a contextually relevant and developmentally appropriate model for religious learning. Practically, it serves as a guide for PAUD educators,

curriculum developers, and policymakers to create more engaging and value-centered early education programs.

This research has a high level of urgency, given the significant role of religious education in shaping the character and morals of children from an early age. A comprehensive Islamic education must instill religious values, encompassing spiritual, social, and moral aspects. In this context, play based learning can be an effective method, as it not only teaches religious knowledge but also helps children understand and apply Islamic values in their daily lives in a fun and developmentally appropriate manner.

In addition, the challenges faced by educators in virtually teaching religious values are also the reason for the importance of this research. Many parents and educators find it challenging to convey spiritual messages to children in a way that not only relies on memorization or lectures but also provides opportunities for children to understand and internalize these values truly. This research aims to offer new insights into how the play based learning method can be utilized to teach Islamic values more effectively and engagingly.

This research presents a novel and innovative approach to teaching Islamic values in early childhood education. Although play-based learning has been widely used in early childhood education to teach various academic concepts, its use in the context of Islamic religious education for young children remains minimal. Therefore, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education methodology at the early childhood education level by integrating religious values into the play-based learning process.

The purpose of this study is to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of a play-based learning approach in teaching Islamic values to young children. The research aims to identify how this method can enhance children's understanding and application of Islamic values in their daily lives, as well as to understand how children respond to and engage with play based learning activities that aim to teach Islamic values.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the literature on Islamic education in early childhood, particularly in terms of the application of play-based learning methods. This research can contribute to the development of Islamic education theory that is more applicable and in line with the needs of child development. Practically, the results of this study can provide guidance for educators, parents, and educational institutions in designing learning activities that not only teach religious knowledge but also shape children's character and behavior under Islamic values.

The implication of this research is to provide a deeper understanding of how play based learning can be used to teach Islamic values in early childhood. This

research can help educators in developing more innovative and effective curriculum and teaching materials for Islamic education at the early childhood education level. In addition, this research is also expected to contribute to efforts to build children's character based on noble religious values, so that they can grow into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have good morals and character.

## 2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study research type. The qualitative approach was chosen because the main objective of this research is to explore and deeply understand the experiences and perceptions of children, educators, and parents related to the application of the play based learning approach in teaching Islamic values in early childhood. This approach is considered suitable because it allows for an in depth exploration of subjective meanings, natural settings, and contextual factors that influence how values are transmitted and internalized. A qualitative method provides the necessary flexibility for the researcher to interpret behavior, interactions, and experiences in their real-life context, which is essential when dealing with young children and religious education.

The research design used in this study is an exploratory case study. This research focuses on an in depth analysis of a particular phenomenon, namely the application of play based learning in teaching Islamic values to early childhood in PAUD educational institutions. An exploratory case study was chosen because this design allows the researcher to describe and identify various aspects related to the implementation of the method, as well as to explore the outcomes that arise from the application of the approach in a more limited context. This research uses qualitative descriptive analysis to describe the phenomena that occur in children's learning, as well as their understanding of Islamic values instilled through play based activities.

To ensure the credibility of the data, several strategies were employed beyond triangulation. First, member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants to validate interpretations. Second, peer debriefing was utilized by involving external qualitative research experts to review the coding framework and emerging themes. Third, prolonged engagement in the research setting ensured that the researcher built rapport and captured natural behaviors over time. These credibility strategies were essential in enhancing the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research findings.

This research was conducted at an early childhood education institution in an urban area that has implemented an Islamic religion-based curriculum and integrated play based learning methods in its learning activities. This institution was chosen as the research location because it has experience in implementing both of these methods, thus enabling researchers to obtain relevant and in depth information regarding the

implementation of these methods. The research subjects consisted of three main groups of young children aged between 4 and 6 years old, who participated in play based learning activities that focused on teaching Islamic values. In addition, the research subjects also involved educators who teach at the institution, who have experience in implementing play based learning and teaching Islamic values to children. Other subjects involved in this study are the parents of the children enrolled in the PAUD institution, who are expected to provide insights into how they see the development of Islamic values in their children at home.

The study involved approximately 30 children, 5 educators, and 10 parents registered at the institution. The selection of subjects was carried out using purposive sampling technique, which selects participants based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. By using this technique, the researcher can ensure that the subjects involved have sufficient knowledge or experience regarding the research topic, and can provide valid and valuable data.

The instrument used in this study is a semi-structured interview guide for educators and parents, which serves to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the application of play based learning in teaching Islamic values. The interview will include questions about the teaching of Islamic values in PAUD, the methods used by educators, as well as parents' views on their children's development in understanding Islamic teachings. In addition to interviews, the researcher will also conduct participatory observations in the classroom to directly observe how play based learning is applied in the context of Islamic education. This observation aims to record children's interaction with the learning materials and see how they respond to play based activities aimed at teaching Islamic values. The researcher will also collect documentation related to teaching materials and progress reports of the children involved in the study.

The data collection techniques employed in this study include semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with educators and parents to gain an in depth understanding of their application and response to play based learning in teaching Islamic values. Participatory observation will allow the researcher to be directly involved in learning activities and observe how this method is applied in teaching religion. Additionally, the researcher will collect documentation from related PAUD institutions, including teaching materials and child development records, to enrich the analysis of data obtained from interviews and observations.

Data collected from interviews, observations, and documentation will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis process begins with transcribing the interviews and coding the data to identify the main themes that emerge from each type of data. Each theme will be analyzed and compared to generate

conclusions relevant to the research objectives. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, data triangulation will be conducted by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Thus, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how play based learning can be applied in teaching Islamic values in early childhood, as well as its effectiveness in enhancing children's knowledge and appreciation of religious teachings.

### **3. Result & Discussion**

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the play based learning approach in teaching Islamic values to early childhood students. To achieve this goal, data were collected through interviews with the institution's management, questionnaires distributed to educators, direct classroom observations, and documentation that supports the research findings. The following are the main findings based on the data analysis.

Respondents in this study consisted of three main groups: young children, educators, and parents. The children involved in this study were aged between 4 to 6 years old, with a total of 30 participants taking part in learning activities at ECD institutions that implement an Islamic values-based play based learning approach. These children came from diverse social backgrounds, but all were enrolled in an institution that incorporates Islamic values into its curriculum. In addition to the children, this study also involved 5 educators who have experience teaching with play based learning methods as well as teaching Islamic values. These educators consisted of 3 women and 2 men, with teaching experience varying from 3 to 7 years. Finally, 10 parents of the children involved in this study were interviewed to explore their views on the development of Islamic values in their children as influenced by learning in PAUD.

Interviews with PAUD management revealed some key findings related to the application of play based learning in teaching Islamic values. The management in general strongly supports the use of this approach as they believe that a play based approach can make religious learning more fun and easily understood by children. Management revealed that through play, children can learn about values such as patience, honesty, and respect in a more practical and applicable context. Activities such as role-playing, drawing, and storytelling are effective ways to teach religious concepts without burdening children with memorization. However, the management also recognized the challenges in implementing this approach, especially concerning time and resource constraints. They revealed that educators need more training in designing and managing effective play based learning activities.

From the questionnaires distributed to educators, the majority of educators (80%) stated that they found it easier to teach Islamic values through the play based

learning approach compared to traditional methods that rely more on lectures and memorization. Educators reported that children showed higher interest and engagement in play based learning activities. Additionally, 60% of educators reported that children grasped Islamic values more quickly after being taught through play, as they were able to relate religious concepts to their direct experiences and daily life contexts. Educators also believe that this method makes teaching more engaging and enjoyable, allowing children to learn more naturally and actively. However, challenges faced were the limited time available to implement the game-based activities to their full potential, as well as the need to clarify communication with parents regarding the purpose and benefits of this method in religious education.

Observations made during the learning sessions showed that the play based learning approach successfully increased children's engagement and participation in the learning process. During observations, researchers noted that children showed greater attention when participating in play based activities, such as role-playing games that taught about prayers, stories, and the Prophet. Children seemed to understand the sequence of movements in prayer and certain prayers more easily when taught through games. In addition, social interaction between children also improved, where they learned to share, cooperate and respect their friends through group games that focused on teaching Islamic values. Most of the children seemed happy and enthusiastic when invited to discuss or participate in activities related to religious teachings, such as drawing or listening to Islamic stories presented in the form of games.

Through the role-play implemented in the classroom, children not only remember the prayers or the sequence of prayer movements, but they can also practice them more nearly. This can be seen from children who start to show concern for good behavior, such as helping each other, speaking politely, and respecting others, all of which are part of the Islamic values taught in the classroom.

To further clarify the research findings, supporting data visualizations are presented in the following tables and graphs. Table 1 shows educators' perceptions of the effectiveness of play based learning in teaching Islamic values. Most educators reported that this method is very effective in improving children's understanding of religious values, with 60% of educators rating this approach as very effective.

**Table 1.** Educators' Perception of the Effectiveness of Play based learning in Teaching Islamic Values

Aspects	Highly Effective (%)	Effective (%)	Effective Enough (%)	Ineffective (%)
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Children's Understanding of Islamic Values	60	20	10	10
Child Participation in Learning	80	10	5	5
Child Social Engagement	70	20	5	5

The following figure shows the percentage of educators' acceptance of the play based learning method in learning Islamic values. The figure illustrates that most educators feel that this method is very effective for increasing children's engagement and understanding of religious teachings.

**Figure 1.** Illustration of Children Performing Role Play about Prayer



Based on the findings obtained from interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations, it can be concluded that the play based learning approach proved to be effective in teaching Islamic values in early childhood. Children showed higher engagement and better understanding of Islamic values after being taught through play, compared to more conventional approaches. Nonetheless, some challenges need to be overcome, such as time constraints and additional training for educators in managing play based learning. This research shows that the integration of religious values in play based learning can create a more enjoyable and effective environment for early childhood development, both cognitively and social-emotionally. These findings are consistent with previous research. For example, Alavi and Mohammadi (2020) also found that play based learning increased conceptual understanding among preschoolers through active participation. Similarly, Azizan and Rahman (2021) reported that moral development including empathy and cooperation was significantly improved when Islamic values were embedded into play scenarios. The

current study confirms and extends these findings by showing that role-playing, storytelling, and interactive activities also enhance early childhood spiritual awareness and behavioral modeling within an Islamic education context.

Based on the findings obtained from interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations, it can be concluded that the play based learning approach is not only enjoyable but also pedagogically practical in transmitting Islamic values in early childhood education. The increased engagement, observable behavioral change, and positive feedback from educators confirm its potential as a viable method for moral instruction in PAUD settings. However, future implementations should address challenges related to instructional time and educator training, especially in designing structured yet flexible activities. This research reaffirms that integrating religious content into child-centered pedagogy significantly contributes to both cognitive and socio-emotional development in early learners.

### **Discussion Results**

Interviews with PAUD management and educators provided an in depth understanding of the application of the play based learning approach in teaching Islamic values in early childhood. Interviews with management revealed that they view play based learning as a very effective method in bringing children closer to Islamic teachings in a more fun and contextualized way. The management stated that play based learning allows children to understand Islamic concepts in a hands-on and practical way. They believe that this method helps children feel more involved and have meaningful experiences in learning Islamic values, such as prayer, good manners, and other important aspects.

However, management also identified some challenges faced in implementing this approach, mainly related to time and resource constraints. Management revealed that although they strongly support the use of the play based learning approach, educators require further training in designing and implementing effective play based activities. Some play activities, such as role plays and other interactive activities, require a considerable amount of time to execute correctly. This means that learning may not be as optimal as expected.

From interviews with educators, it was found that the majority of educators agreed with the management's statement regarding the effectiveness of play based learning. They believe that this method makes learning more engaging and interactive, enabling children to better remember and understand Islamic values. For example, in role play activities that teach prayer, children more quickly understand the sequence of prayer movements and the associated prayers through their direct experience in the play. Educators also revealed that children tend to be more

interested and engaged in activities that involve games, rather than just passively listening to lectures or memorizing prayers.

However, educators also mentioned the challenge of limited time. Play based activities that require social interaction and hands-on experience take longer than more traditional learning methods. Educators feel there needs to be adjustments in the time allocated for each activity, so that children can fully enjoy and understand play based learning.

A questionnaire distributed to 5 educators provided a more detailed picture of their perceptions of the effectiveness of the play based learning approach in teaching Islamic values. According to the questionnaire results, 80% of the educators reported that they found it easier to teach Islamic values through play compared to traditional methods. This is in line with the interview results which showed that educators felt children were more engaged and enthusiastic in play based learning. Game-based learning provides children with the opportunity to learn in a more engaging way, which increases their motivation to learn about religious values.

Meanwhile, 60% of educators who completed the questionnaire stated that children understand Islamic values more quickly when taught through games. For example, children more easily understand the importance of prayer and supplication when they can participate in role-playing games that mimic daily activities related to Islamic teachings. Games that involve social activities and sharing, such as inviting friends to play together, also help children understand the importance of good manners in their social lives.

However, while many educators find play based learning effective, the biggest challenge they face is time constraints. The time available for play based activities is often insufficient to achieve the desired learning objectives. Therefore, many educators suggest that more flexible and structured learning time could be provided to optimize the implementation of this method.

Classroom observations conducted over several weeks showed that the play based learning approach increased children's engagement in learning Islamic values. Children were seen to be more active and happy to participate in various activities involving play, such as role-playing, drawing and listening to Islamic stories. In the role play that taught prayer, children could easily imitate the movements of prayer with better understanding, as they experienced it directly through play.

Observations also showed that children's social engagement increased during the game-based learning. Children learn to share, respect and cooperate with their friends, which is in line with the Islamic values taught in the learning. For example, in the food sharing activity in the game, children are taught to share with their friends, which is one of the important values in Islam.

In addition, observations showed that the children also started to show better behavior in their daily lives, such as good manners and self-control, which can be linked to the teaching of Islamic values through play. They have more respect for each other and try to avoid bad behavior such as fighting or disrespecting friends.

The results of this study are in line with previous studies showing that play based learning is effective in teaching social and moral values in early childhood. A study by Alavi and Mohammadi (2020) revealed that children who learned through play had a better understanding of social and moral concepts compared to children who learned through conventional methods. This research also supports the findings found by Azizan and Rahman (2021), who stated that the game-based approach provides an opportunity for children to learn religious and social values in a more fun and natural way.

However, while the findings are in line with previous studies, this research adds a new dimension by integrating Islamic values in play based learning. The research shows how Islamic values, such as prayer, supplication and good manners, can be more easily understood by young children through an approach that involves play. It also points out the challenges in implementing this approach, which requires adequate resources and more intensive training of educators.

These findings align with a growing body of literature highlighting the pedagogical value of play. For example, Alavi and Mohammadi (2020) emphasized that play based learning enhances children's moral comprehension by fostering active involvement, while Azizan and Rahman (2021) found that children exhibited better empathy and cooperation through interactive religious games. This study contributes to that discourse by illustrating how these mechanisms function specifically within the Islamic education context, extending previous generalizations into faith-based early education.

The practical implication of this research is that early childhood institutions can confidently integrate play based methods into their Islamic curriculum. Through activities such as role playing, storytelling, and collaborative games, children not only learn religious doctrines but also apply them in meaningful social settings. This strengthens not only their religious knowledge but also nurtures emotional intelligence, peer interaction, and prosocial behavior. To maximize the benefits, it is essential that teachers receive ongoing professional development and are given sufficient flexibility in the timetable to implement these strategies.

Parental involvement also plays a critical role in reinforcing the values taught at school, which makes home-school collaboration a key aspect in Islamic character development for children. However, to optimize the application of this method, further training is needed for educators so that they can design and implement more effective play based activities. Educational institutions also need to provide more

flexible time for play based activities and ensure that parents are involved in supporting their children's learning at home.

Although this study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of play based learning in teaching Islamic values, some limitations need to be noted. First, the number of respondents in this study was limited, involving only 30 children, 5 educators, and 10 parents. Therefore, the results of this study may not be fully representative of all ECD institutions that implement the play-based learning approach.

Another limitation is the study's limited duration. This study lasted only a few weeks, which may not be sufficient to fully evaluate the long-term impact of play based learning on children's understanding and practice of Islamic values. Further research conducted over a more extended period and with a larger sample will provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of this approach. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate longitudinal designs that assess behavioral changes over time and examine how different types of play activities contribute uniquely to specific Islamic values.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study examines the effectiveness of the play-based learning approach in teaching Islamic values to early childhood students. Based on the results of interviews with management, questionnaires administered to educators, and direct classroom observations, it can be concluded that this approach has a positive impact on enhancing the understanding and internalization of Islamic values in children.

First, the management of PAUD institutions showed strong support for the implementation of play based learning, which is considered effective in getting children to engage and understand Islamic concepts in a fun and practical way. Educators, who are the main actors in the implementation of this method, report that children are more enthusiastic and quickly understand Islamic values through role-playing and other play based activities, such as drawing and listening to Islamic stories.

Observations made during the lessons also show that the children are highly engaged in the play based activities. They not only learn the prayer movements and prayers, but also understand the importance of values such as honesty, mutual respect and sharing, which are at the core of Islamic teachings. In the social and emotional context, the children showed improvement in sharing, cooperation and self-control skills, reflecting the internalization of Islamic values in their daily lives.

However, although this study demonstrates the success of play based learning in teaching Islamic values, there are some challenges to overcome. The limited time available for play based activities is a significant obstacle to the optimal

implementation of this method. In addition, the importance of training educators in designing and managing practical play based activities is also an essential factor that needs to be considered.

Overall, this study concludes that play based learning is an effective method for teaching Islamic values in early childhood. This approach not only improves children's understanding of religious teachings but also supports their social and emotional development. Therefore, ECD education institutions are advised to continue developing and integrating this approach in their curriculum, with training support for educators and parental involvement in the learning process.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to a single early childhood education institution, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the duration of observation was constrained, potentially limiting the scope of behavioral changes that could be observed over a more extended period.

For future research, longitudinal studies involving multiple institutions and larger sample sizes are recommended to explore the long-term impact of play based Islamic education. Further exploration into the types of games most effective for specific values, as well as the role of parent involvement in reinforcing values at home, would also enrich the current findings.

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