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## Assessment of Technical Education Graduate Programme on Personal and Professional Development of Individuals in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the impact of technical education graduate programmes, specifically the Masters of Technology programme on individuals' personal and professional development in Nigeria. It explores the key dimensions of career advancement including managerial skills, leadership capabilities, salary progression, job status, job changes, and standard of living. Employing a mixed-method research design, the study combined primary data collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Data collection was conducted between April and May 2023, with a team of trained research assistants surveying 508 alumni from Cross River University of Technology, Calabar (UNICROSS), spanning cohorts from 2012 to 2022. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative insights were examined thematically to identify recurring trends and narratives. Findings reveal that the Masters programme significantly enhances graduates' managerial and leadership skills, contributing to increased job mobility, improved job status, and better-earning potential. However, gaps remain in aligning programme outcomes with industry-specific needs, particularly fostering adaptability and innovative problem-solving. This study highlights the critical role of technical education in developing human capital and contributing to workforce readiness in Nigeria. It underscores the need for curriculum enhancements, greater alignment with industry demands, and investment in infrastructure to ensure sustainable impacts on graduates' careers. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in addressing challenges and improving the quality of technical education programmes for national development.*

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## Introduction

In recent years, the changing industry requirements in emerging economies have brought heightened attention to the role of higher education institutions in producing graduates who are ready to meet industry expectations (Hennemann & Liefner, 2010). Technical education graduate programmes, in particular, have gained prominence as they aim to equip students with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern market and adapt to uncertainties in the business environment (Ryan & Tilbury, 2013). Central to this discourse is the question: are higher education institutions adequately preparing graduates to transition into the workforce effectively? The answer lies in understanding how technical education contributes to the personal and professional development of individuals, shaping their employability and career prospects.

Technical education has emerged as a cornerstone for equipping individuals with specialized skills and knowledge that are essential in today's workforce. The primary motivation for enrolling in technical education graduate programmes is the promise of economic and financial independence, as highlighted by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005). Graduates with technical education certifications are statistically more likely to secure higher-paying jobs and managerial positions compared to their non-technical counterparts (Bedard & Herman, 2008). This perceived "entry passport" to better career opportunities underpins the significance of technical education. Moreover, technical education programmes are designed to foster critical managerial competencies such as leadership, innovative thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and stress tolerance, which are indispensable for navigating the demands of the workplace (Brown, 2004).

The value of technical education extends beyond economic gains, significantly contributing to both personal and professional development. Personal development focuses on building a graduate's confidence, adaptability, and interpersonal skills, while professional development emphasizes career growth, technical expertise, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. Muja and Appelbaum (2012) argue that technical education generates tangible benefits like higher earnings and career advancement, as well as intangible benefits such as enhanced problem-solving capabilities and lifelong learning skills. Thus, technical education not only enriches the human capital of graduates but also enhances their potential to drive innovation and productivity in the workplace.

The employability of graduates from technical education institutions remains a critical parameter for assessing the quality of such programmes.

Employability, as defined by Knight and Yorke (2003) refers to "a set of achievements—skills, understandings, and personal attributes—that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations." This definition emphasizes both the ability to secure employment and the capability to sustain a fulfilling career. Employability encompasses a broader perspective, including the capacity to manage one's career and lead a meaningful life. However, studies in this area often adopt a narrow view, focusing solely on immediate job placement rates. Maxwell, Scott, Macfarlane & Williamson (2009) highlight that employability skills, which are essential for business competitiveness and economic prosperity, are often under-trained in educational institutions, particularly in technology education programmes.

Technical education graduate programmes play a pivotal role in preparing individuals for the workforce, contributing to their personal and professional development while enhancing their employability. These programmes not only serve as pathways to economic independence and career success but also enable graduates to navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving market. As stakeholders including policymakers, educators, and industry leaders continue to scrutinize the quality of technical education, a comprehensive approach to employability that goes beyond immediate job placement is imperative. By fostering the holistic development of graduates, technical education can effectively bridge the gap between academic learning and industry needs, ensuring a sustainable impact on individuals and the broader economy.

## Statement of the problem

In Nigeria, graduate programmes of technical education are expected to contribute significantly to personal and professional development, enabling graduates to navigate complex job markets, secure employment, and achieve career advancement. However, there is growing concern among stakeholders, policymakers, educators, employers, and students about the extent to which these objectives are met.

One key issue is the alignment between the curriculum of technical education programmes and the evolving needs of the industry. Many graduates face challenges in securing employment, raising questions about whether the programmes adequately prepare them for the demands of the workforce. While employability is often used as a metric to evaluate the effectiveness of technical education, there is a tendency to adopt a narrow focus on immediate job placement rates rather than a broader view that considers career sustainability, skill adaptability, and lifelong learning capabilities.

Furthermore, the quality of technical education in Nigeria has been criticized for its inability to foster critical soft skills, such as leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork, which are essential for professional growth. Personal development aspects including confidence-building and adaptability, are also often neglected in favour of technical knowledge. This gap has implications not only for graduates' career trajectories but also for the broader economic and societal benefits expected from a well-trained technical workforce. The problem is further compounded by inadequate infrastructure, outdated teaching methods, and limited exposure to practical, hands-on experiences in many technical education institutions in Nigeria. These challenges undermine the potential of technical education to contribute meaningfully to both personal and professional development. Therefore, this study sought to assess the effectiveness of technical education graduate programmes in promoting personal and professional development and to identify areas for improvement. Addressing this problem is essential for ensuring that technical education contributes to individual empowerment, workforce readiness, and national development.

### **Purpose of the study**

This research aims to assess the technical education graduate programme on individuals' personal and professional development in Nigeria. In pursuit of the above research objectives, the following research questions were developed:

1. What is the relevance of the technical graduate programme to professional and career development?
2. What is the impact of a technical graduate programme on individual growth and development?
3. To what extent do technical graduate programme help in the development one's managerial capabilities?
4. What is the quality of life improved as a result of the technical graduate programme?

### **Method**

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess the career impact of the Masters programme of technical education graduates. The study focused on examining the

influence of the program on managerial skills, management capabilities, salary increases, job status, job changes, and standard of living. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact. The study was conducted at Cross River University of Technology (UNICROSS), Calabar, Nigeria. This location was selected due to its role in producing Masters Graduates and its access to alumni networks. Participants included graduates spanning from the maiden class of 2012 to the class of 2022, representing diverse industries and experiences. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire administered to alumni Masters. The questionnaire consisted of sections measuring leadership skills, managerial capabilities, salary progression, job changes, job status, and standard of living. Additionally, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to gain deeper insights into graduates' experiences and perceptions. Email invitations with an overview of the study and the questionnaire link were sent to participants. Four trained data collectors facilitated data collection over two months (April–May 2023).

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequency distributions, means, and regression analysis, to identify patterns and relationships. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed thematically to capture detailed narratives and identify emerging themes. The combination of these methods ensured a robust analysis of the Masters program's impact on graduates' personal and professional development. This methodology provided a comprehensive framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the Master's program in fostering career advancement and addressing the development needs of technical education graduates.

### **Results**

The data collected directly was mapped with the research questions formulated for this study. The summary and analysis of the same are presented below.

**Table 1: Relevance of the programme to professional and career development**

Criteria for assessing relevance to professional/career development	N	Mean	Std
Course content relevant to current and future business environment	508	5.51	0.98
Concepts and tools apply to the local context	508	5.40	1.06
Concepts and tools apply to the global context	508	5.52	0.98
Courses apply and are relevant to contemporary issues	508	5.76	0.96
Courses provide value to job performance and career	508	5.70	1.26
The program provided tools helpful in diagnosing and solving organizational problems	508	5.46	1.12
The participant was able to link the theories taught to real-life scenarios	508	5.69	1.00

Source: Primary data

Table 1 is specific to the application of the programme and its relevance to real-life situations. The highest and lowest mean difference was 0.36, i.e. less than half a point. The significance of the concepts and tools to the global context showed similar ratings; a slight standard deviation was noticed. In the local context, the ratings differed, resulting in a more significant standard deviation. The relevance of the content to the current and future technical environment and its applicability to contemporary issues also showed a similar rating

and more minor standard deviations than their perceived value to job performance and career. Finally, a substantial standard deviation was recorded for the usefulness or otherwise of tools for diagnosing and solving organizational problems and linking classroom theories and real-world practices. The results conclude that graduate education is relevant to graduates' professional and career development. This is in line with the findings of Mayhew, Pascarella, Bowman, Rockenbach, Seifert, Terenzini, Buenemann & Sutton, 2011.

**Table 2: The rigours of the programme to professional and career development**

Criteria for reckoning programme rigours to professional/career development	N	Mean	Std.
The amount of work done in the program was more than expected	508	4.68	1.77
The level of work (discussion and analysis) was consistent with the program	508	5.61	1.19
The program challenged the participant academically	508	5.74	1.25

Source: Primary data

Table 2 shows differing responses concerning the programme's rigours. The difference between the highest and lowest mean was just over one point. The standard deviation was closest to the programme's level of work (discussion and analysis). It varied more in the programme's academic challenges. It widened further concerning

the usual amount of work performed under the programme. The highest deviation between responses was detected for the anticipated amount. The graduates were more satisfied with the level of work and the academic challenge than the notion that the programme involved more rigours than anticipated.

**Table 3: Format of learning-facilitated transfer of knowledge**

Learning Format	N	Mean	Std
E-learning enhances participant's classroom experience	508	0.98	2.07
Group work enhanced participant's classroom experience	508	5.73	1.34
Individual presentations enhanced the classroom experience	508	5.53	1.58
Concentrated courses enhanced overall programme experience	508	5.09	1.79
Presentations enhanced the overall experience	508	5.78	1.07

Source: Primary data

Table 3 presents the formats used for the transfer of learning. The e-learning platform was not popular among the graduates; hence, the low mean and the significant standard deviation. The mean difference between group work, individual presentations, overall programme experience, and presentations was 0.69. The standard deviation is

more influential across the spectrum of responses but more so for the overall programme experience. This illustrates that there were vast differences in the opinion of respondents concerning the attainment of knowledge and transfer of learning thus indicating that presentations and group work enhanced the learning experience.

**Table 4: Learning method with the most significant impact on professional skills**

Pedagogy used	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
No Answer	3	0.6	0.6
E-Learning	3	0.6	1.2
Group Work	264	52.0	53.1
Individual Work	76	15.0	68.1
Concentrated Course	52	10.2	78.3
Presentations	110	21.7	100
Total	508	100	

Source: Primary data

Table 4 considers how the learning pedagogy/methods impacted professional skill enhancement. The highest impact was seen in group work, which accounted for 52 per cent of the responses, followed by presentations with 21.7 per cent. It also turns out that the entire course at 10 per cent was the least preferred learning method, followed by individual work at 15 per cent. Most

graduates favoured group work and presentations in that order. They reckoned these learning methods as having the most significant impact on their professional experience. These practices were more collaborative and interactive by nature. The result also underscores the fact that e-learning is not popular among graduates.

**Table 5: Degree of the belief that the programme helped improve management capabilities**

Management Capability	N	Mean	Std
Leadership Capability	508	4.23	0.74
Presentation Skills	508	4.24	0.76
Innovative Thinking	508	4.02	0.80
Teamwork	508	4.33	0.71
Stress Tolerance	508	4.00	0.88
Problem-Solving	508	4.06	0.72

Source: Primary data

Table 5 summarizes the graduate's perception of whether pursuing a graduate business program has improved one's managerial capabilities. On a 5-point scale, the mean was very high, and the standard deviation was slight. This lends significant substance to the belief that most

graduates consider a graduate program in business to improve their managerial acumen, with teamwork and presentations considered the most important contributors to the learning process. But, again, the findings are in line with the study (Lechuga, 2011).

**Table 6 - Level of agreement of significant salary increase after graduation**

Significant Salary Increase after Graduation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Disagree	42	8.3	8.3	8.3
Disagree	97	19.1	19.1	27.4
Neutral	75	14.8	14.8	42.1
Agree	197	38.8	38.8	80.9
Strongly Agree	97	19.1	19.1	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

*Source:* *Primary data*  
 Table 6 reports on the graduate's opinions concerning significant salary increases after graduation; 38.8 per cent agreed with the assertion, 19.1 per cent agreed strongly, 14.8 per cent were neutral, and 19.1 per cent disagreed. In comparison, 8.3 per cent strongly disagreed, and less than half of the respondents strongly agreed. Notably, 50 per cent of respondents agreed to assert a significant salary increase after graduation.

**Table 7: Percentage of salary increase after graduation**

Percentage of salary increase	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Declined to Respond	238	46.9	46.9
0-24	63	12.4	59.3
25-49	79	15.6	74.8
50-74	52	10.2	85.0
75-99	23	4.5	89.6
>100	53	10.4	100
Total	508	100	

*Source: Primary data*

Table 7 highlights the percentage of salary increase that graduates of technical courses experienced after graduation. Although 46.9 per cent of the graduates declined to respond, those that did respond revealed they regarded their salary expectation as the reward for the effort and time they had put into the technical graduate programme, 12.4 per cent expected a moderate 0-24 per cent increase, at the other end of the scale, 10.4 per cent expected a 100 per cent or more rise in pay; Between these extremities, 15.6 per cent, 10.2 per cent, and 4.5 per cent said they would settle for salary hikes of 25-49 per cent, 50-74 per cent, and 75-99 per cent respectively. Most respondents

benefited from salary increases after graduation, meaning there is a 25 – 49 per cent average addition in monetary value for technical graduates.

A survey conducted by (Shimizu & Higuchi, 2009) found that "on average, graduates who have undergone a business graduate program had a greater return on investment (ROI) regarding higher wages, over and above their undergraduate counterparts, regardless of whether the students paid the tuition privately or were sponsored by the company. The results of the current salary increase validate the study (Shimizu & Higuchi, 2009) and rebut claims (Baruch & Leeming, 2001) that found little support for an income premium.

**Table 8 - Agreement or disagreement to improved job status within the current company**

Job Status	Yes	No	Total
Salary Increase	254	254	508
Expansion of Portfolio	360	148	508
Improved Job Title	307	201	508
Increased Responsibility	379	129	508

Source: Primary data

Table 8 shows the improved job status within the current company. Seventy-five per cent of the graduates agreed that an improved job status comes with increased responsibility, while twenty-five per cent felt otherwise. Seventy per cent of the respondents acknowledged an expansion of their portfolio; on the other hand, 30 per cent did not see any portfolio augmentation. 60.43 per cent of those surveyed thought that portfolio expansion would come with an improved job title. At the same time, 39.56 per cent believed it would be business as usual. The salary increase is evenly split 50-50 on the scale. Most of the graduates looked forward to

an improved job status within the company, besides being entrusted with added responsibilities. The finding confirms other results regarding salary increases. The research shows that graduate technology studies positively affect managerial skills and capabilities, which in turn affects the compensation of the graduate and has a wide-ranging impact on a graduate's career advancement and quality of life. This is in line with the findings of Zlatkin-Troitschanskaria, Shavelson and Kulin (2015).

**Table 9 - Number of respondents who changed jobs within 1- 3 years after graduation**

Respondents Who Changed Jobs 1- 3 years after Graduation	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Did Not Change Job	211	41.5	41.5
Changed Job	297	58.5	100
Total	508	100	

Source: Primary data

Table 9 shows that within 1-3 years, 58.5 per cent of the graduates changed jobs, while 41.5 per cent stayed with the same organization. Some graduates would have been supported, financially

and otherwise by their company and might have entered into contracts with the organization, which rendered them incapable of changing jobs within the 1-3-year horizon. The graduates' quality of life was affected by a job change.

**Table 10 - Number of respondents who changed careers 15 years after graduation**

Respondents Who Changed Career 1-5 Years after Graduation	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Did Not Change Career	335	65.9	65.9
Changed Career	173	34.1	100.0
	508	100.0	

Source: Primary data

Table 10 shows that 34.1 per cent of the graduates changed careers 1-5 years after graduation. In comparison, 65.9 per cent stayed in the same industry or functional area. While signing

up with the programme, most respondents have looked for career growth and upward mobility within their current company or industry. A smaller number of respondents have contemplated career change while joining the programme.

**Table 11: Number of respondents who experienced an improved standard of living after graduation**

Respondents Improved Standard of Living after Graduation	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Not Improved	159	31.3	31.3
Improved	349	68.7	100.0
Total	508	100.0	

Source: Primary data

Table 11 displays the graduates' improved standard of living. The majority of respondents (69 per cent) experienced an improvement in their living standards upon completing the programme.

Of course, respondents would have carried differing perceptions of an improved standard of life, often dictated by their personal needs, desires, and stage in life, which is a bias in the study.

**Table 12: Factors affecting increased standard of living**

Factors Affecting Increased Standard of Living	Yes	No	Total
Academic Qualifications	309	199	508
Learning Experience–Real-Life Master	357	151	508
Personal Achievement and Motivation	356	152	508
Networks and Relationships	254	254	598

Source: Primary data

Table 12 sums up factors affecting an increased standard of living. Most of the graduates indicated that the application-based learning experience and practical exposure assimilated during the programme and graduates' achievement, motivation, and drive to succeed helped them realize the increased standard of living. Network and relationships tied at 50-50 among the

respondents, while academic qualifications received a score of 309. All these factors positively influenced the graduates' standard of living. It is understood from the results that any successful graduate programme should be application-oriented. In addition, students need to be given practical exposure through industry visits, guest lectures, case studies, and internships.

**Table 13: Number of respondents who pursued higher studies (Ph.D.) after graduation**

Respondents Who Pursued higher studies	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Did Not Pursue	479	94.3	94.3	94.3
Pursued	29	5.7	5.7	100
Total	508	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary data

As per Table 13, 5.7 per cent of graduates pursue higher studies after graduation. The majority of the respondents opt for a job/ career after

graduation. Therefore, the course content and the learning outcomes should focus on preparing the student to transition to industry and equip them to take up new challenges in their career.

**Table 14: Number of respondents who started on business after graduation**

Respondents Who Started on Business after Graduation	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Did Not Start Business	386	76.0	76	76
Started Business	122	24.0	24	100
	508	100.0	100	

Source: Primary data

Table 14 indicates that 24 per cent of graduates launched their own business rather than continuing to work for a company. All technical education graduates must invariably have entrepreneurship as a compulsory course and equip

the graduate with the skillset required to start their enterprises and generate employment. The universities need incubation centres to develop and test innovative business ideas of the graduates as a hand-holding exercise.

**Table 15: Overall level of satisfaction with faculty**

Overall Level of Satisfaction with Faculty	N	Mean	Std.
Knowledgeable in the Subject Area	508	4.16	0.57
Able to Engage and Interact with the Class	508	4.14	0.61
Able to Clearly Explain Theory	508	4.02	0.62
Able to Bring Theories to Life with Examples or Case Studies	508	4.05	0.67

Source: Primary data

Table 15 features the overall level of satisfaction with faculty in subject knowledge, engagement, and interaction in class, the extent to which they explain the theory, and further apply it through case studies. The mean difference is 0.14, and the standard deviation is relatively small. The results suggest that graduates were mainly satisfied with their faculty.

**Conclusions and Implications**

This study explores how technology education has benefited graduates at personal and professional levels. The study examined leadership skills, managerial capabilities, salary increase, job status, job change, and standard of living related to the career development of graduates. Understanding these perceived effects of the graduate programme will help academicians, higher education institutions, and policymakers design programmes that give an abundance of opportunities for future personal and professional development graduates. Besides this, the perceived effectiveness of the graduate programme will positively affect the image, marketability, and revenues the programme generates. The technical program imparts the graduates with managerial skills and enables them to excel in presentation skills, leadership capabilities, thinking out of the box, group and team dynamics, problem-solving, and handling stress. The survey in 2020 cited adaptability, capacity for performing in times of uncertainty and transition, communication skills, and one's ability to navigate the challenges of technological change as the most critical skills a technical education graduate needs to possess to be successful in the industry. The content and curriculum of the technical education graduate programme need to be relevant to the industry and respond effectively to the current industry

challenges. Graduate schools should offer the most up-to-date curriculum and content in all functional areas, reflecting the current socio-economic realities. Content needs to be relooked from time to time based on industry requirements and employers' and graduates' feedback from across a cross-section of businesses and industries. The contemporary curriculum and teaching pedagogy in graduate technical schools help graduates/learners gain real value from pursuing a graduate programme. Graduates need to be introduced to every business segment throughout the programme with practical exposure to make the transition into industry and employability easy. When checked with graduates' personal experiences, this resulted in a phenomenal body of acquired knowledge, which, in turn, enriched the graduate's life and made job handling easier.

In short, the programme brought meaningful transformation to the lives of a graduate. It is observed that pursuing graduate education not only added value to the graduates but also value to current and prospective employers. Furthermore, the graduate programme offered the possibility to change professions and instilled in them the confidence to take up new positions and pursue new careers.

Higher education institutions need to develop new classroom practices and shift the education priorities closer to the industry requirements. The education providers and faculty must rethink curriculum design and change their education priorities and learning experiences. The graduate programmes need to help the student to transform from lower levels to higher levels of cognitive thinking. A stronger focus on imparting skills to the graduate is best seen in the adoption of the Authentic Teaching and Learning Model, which is in line with the Assurance of Learning Standards introduced in 2003 to monitor and measure student

learning and ensure students' progress towards predefined learning goals.

Graduate schools need to emphasize entrepreneurship, where the graduates need a holistic perspective of the technology realm to start a business of their own and impart and equip them with all the skills required. Every technical segment needs to be introduced to the graduates throughout the programme, exposing them to a wealth of industry experience and interdisciplinary expertise. The relationships nurtured through professional and personal bonds with industry usually prove invaluable in developing rewarding careers. The technical education graduates interviewed are willing to recruit their juniors in university from their programme of study to work in their organization, indicating that networking opportunities at technical schools are crucial for technical schools to help boost one's upward career mobility (Tilbury, 2016). A survey of technical education graduates says, "Startup owners with technology degrees not only earn more than their peers in corporate roles three years after acquiring the degree but also enjoy significantly higher success rates." In a larger sense, every individual pursuing a technology graduate education makes a valuable investment in one's future, family, and society.

Unpredictability is increasingly becoming the currency of global geopolitics, so the Masters graduate must be able to track market dynamics in real-time and anticipate and reformulate strategic moves in much shorter planning cycles than before. To stay on top of change, a technical education graduate must go beyond theoretical knowledge and strive to be more creative, ethical, socially aware, and globally connected.

The result of any technical education programme at graduate school is to contribute towards the overall development of the society/community and, by so doing, help drive significant and noticeable change to the technology landscape and shape students' destinies for a better future. The most critical skill a technical education graduate needs to possess is the conceptual capacity to track the impact of global economic and geopolitical uncertainties and navigate complex and rapidly emerging technical education contexts. Besides, graduates must be willing to assume higher leadership and innovative roles as their organizations pursue opportunities for sustainable growth, economic diversification, and increased competitiveness. The practical applications in the technology world ensure that their graduate programme exceeds expectations and seeks to gain the confidence of industry experts and leaders by providing them with the security that their future recruits are getting the best exposure possible on campus. The graduate schools have standardized their knowledge delivery mechanisms across a

portfolio of programmes to improve continuously to ensure their relevance to a dynamically evolving market. Graduate schools have also embraced quality accreditations to assess, monitor, and measure student learning to pre-defined learning goals.

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