

COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN INSIGHT INTO ADULT LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT IN ABEOKUTA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OGUN STATE

Kugbayi, Lateef Iyanda

Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello
University, Zaria

Abstract

Years before now, the thought of literacy was limited to the ability to read and write. This was later extended to the ability to express some built up knowledge that has been acquired within a period of time, especially in a particular field of knowledge. Meanwhile, in the contemporary world, the evolution of technology has brought about advancement in communication outside the use of written or printed texts. The use of computer and some other related electronic devices has exposed the entire world to a form of communication that is interactive with or without physical representations of interactants through the social media. Despite the efforts of world governments, and organisations like UNESCO and MDGs, a new challenge is posed to the achievement of literacy at this level, particularly among the adults who have, no doubt, acquired some level of formal education alongside the traditional communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the light of this, this study, Communication Skills in the 21st Century: An Insight into Adult Literacy in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State, is embarked upon to find out relevant ways technological communication skills can help to achieve adult literacy in the contemporary Nigerian society.

Keywords: *Technological Communication Skills, Adult Literacy, Adult Literacy in the 21st Century.*

Introduction

In the study of language, the central point is communication. It could be considered as the factor which other unique peculiarities of human language hinge upon. Apart from the fact that language through its communicative effects help humans to make their intentions, ideas, feelings and thoughts known to others in a given community, it serves as a channel through which its users receive feedback from whosoever the intentions, feelings, ideas or thoughts are directed. Communication itself as a phenomenon cuts across every aspect of human life. This ranges from an informal linguistic interaction, such as colloquial talks, to an extensively sophisticated level of transferring messages. Whether language is used for formal or informal communication, it has been mentioned that it can be acquired or learnt through the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

World linguists like Chomsky, postulate that the first two skills - listening and speaking – can be naturally acquired by every normal child in respect to any form(s) of language such a child is exposed to before lateralisation takes place. Thus, acquisition of listening and speaking is, in most cases, a natural phenomenon. This does not overrule the fact that as an adolescent or adult, one can still acquire or learn listening and speaking skills of a new language(s) later in life. Meanwhile, from the perspective of reading and writing skills achievement, a considerable level of consciousness is involved and through reading and writing, a greater opportunity is opened to the literate. In short, ability to read and write has served for several years as a demarcating line between the literate and the illiterate.

It is in view of bridging the gap, governments of the world and international organisations like UNESCO and MDGs have made tremendous efforts toward achieving education for all. Part of the efforts is ensuring great increase in the children enrolment into primary schools all over the world. The adults too are not left out. Provisions have also been made for illiterate adults to become literate through series of adult literacy programmes.

However, it has been observed that in recent times, the challenge of achieving adult literacy has gone beyond adults' being able to read and write. The level of technological advancement in the 21st century is posing a problem to the adults - whether educated or not. This does not exclude many Nigerian adults, especially those in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State. The reality then is that even though it could be possible for an adult to have acquired formal education with certificates of different degrees, such an individual could still be illiterate especially when he finds it difficult to access or process information through technological provisions like computer or through the internet or the social media. In Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State for example, there are many adults who could be considered as literate owing to their level of education and their ability to read and write meaningfully when it comes to the use of printed or ink material. However, the ability of majority of this group of people to access and meaningfully interpret computer based information needs to be looked into.

Research questions

It is considered necessary to carry out this work to find out relevant ways technological communication skills can help achieve adult literacy in the 21st century in Abeokuta South

Local Government Area of Ogun State. In order to achieve the task, this work looks forward to finding answers to the following questions.

- i. What is the relationship between the traditional adult literacy level of the educated adults of Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State and modern day communication skills?
- ii. How can technological communication skills be used in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State to access, analyse, evaluate, communicate and use information to solve problems through adult literacy?
- iii. What are the ways acquisition of technological communication skills can foster adult literacy in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State and, by extension, in the contemporary Nigerian society?

Scope, objectives and significance of the study

The paper focuses on the place of communication skills in the 21st century with interest in finding out adult literacy achievement level of the educated in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State. This is meant to ascertain the level at which these adults have acquired the ability to use technology in accessing and transferring of information either locally or internationally. The work centres on some educated individuals in the local government with at least a National Diploma (ND) certificate. These are selected among secondary school teachers, lecturers of higher institutions, local government employees and civil servants. Specifically, the work is interested in finding out the level at which the involved individuals can use the computer to process and decode information independently. In the light of this, objectives of the study are to:

- i. Explain the relationship between the traditional adult literacy level of the educated adults of Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State and modern day communication skills.
- ii. Ascertain how technological communication skills can be used in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State to access, analyse, evaluate, communicate and use information to solve problems through adult literacy.
- iii. Identify ways acquisition of technological communication skills can foster adult literacy in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State and, by extension, in the contemporary Nigerian society.

Today, the entire world has become a global village and one of the major ways to be communicatively efficient individuals on the globe is the ability to demonstrate a good knowledge of the 21st century information technological communication skills. This work is therefore considered to be significant as it focuses on how acquisition of the information technological communication skills can improve adult literacy in Nigeria generally and Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State specifically.

Review of literature

An Overview of Communication and Its Skills

Communication has been the central purpose of language among humans. This is proved by the fact that at different occasions when individuals have one thing or the other to pass across to some other individuals, some form of communication through language has to be employed. Thus, Sapir (1921) describes language as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires

by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.” The definition suggests that communication is very important in achieving the purpose of any linguistic interaction whether it is that of transfer of ideas, emotions or desires. Although several authors like Weekley (1997:338) have been able to trace the etymology of the word ‘communication’ to the Latin word, ‘communicare,’ which means ‘to make common’ or ‘to share,’ it is not easy to provide a stereotype definition of the concept. This is connected to the multitudinous nature of it.

According to DeVito (1986) it is the “process or act of transmitting a message from a sender to a receiver, through a channel.” In carrying out the interchange however, the sender (encoder) becomes the receiver (decoder) and the receiver (decoder) changes to sender (encoder) of thought or idea and vice versa as long as the process progresses. Hence, Adelabu, Longe and Ogundiran (2010) are of the view that communication is the exchange of information or message between, at least, two people. This exchange process is stabilized by the ability of each individual participant to make sense from coordinated, dynamic, constantly changing and shifting response modes within the total situation of communication (Andersen 1959).

Meaningful understanding therefore becomes the core of communication. Consequently, regardless of how important what is communicated may be, it will be of no use and come short of its purpose, if it lacks a comprehension value. It is that ability to understand that eventually determines a successful change or shift in response of individuals using communication. In essence, communication does not end with the process of information transmission but common understanding from one person to another or vice versa. Traditionally, the phenomenon of communication has been basically characterized with the use of

symbolic words, pictures, figures, graphs, etc. to emphasize literacy and reflect more on the importance of using writing in the form of graphic symbols to communicate especially in the centuries preceding the second half of the twentieth century. Although the effect of literacy this way has undoubtedly been immeasurable to the humanity, a process that links discontinuous parts of the living world to one another in the forms of technology and social interaction is considered a greater value.

Literacy: An Overview

It is very common and naturally possible to acquire the communication skills of listening and speaking of any language. Mostly, these skills are acquired with little or no conscious efforts. However, it is a different thing entirely to achieve an efficient level of reading and writing of any language. In fact, users of a particular language are usually of two different groups – those who are only proficient in the listening and speaking of the language and those who do not only speak it but also have learnt the ability to read and write in the language. The dividing line between the two groups of language users is what is called literacy. Thus, “literacy shape our perceptions of individuals who fall on either side of the standard (what a ‘literate’ or ‘nonliterate’ is like)” (Keefe and Copeland 2011).

Historically, the word ‘literate’ is interpreted as something familiar with literature or ‘well educated, learned.’ According to Soares (1992), literacy in the past is construed from the point of view of economy, politics and other forces. From his explanations, throughout the middle ages, the issue of literacy was secluded to the ability to speak, read and write Latin. It was only the few elite groups then that had access to formal education and Latin text. However, the 16th century witnessed some invention and advancement in the printing

technology in Europe. As a result, there was a growth in the number of languages used apart from Latin and eventually, that led to an explosion in literacy level and increase in the number of those who could read and write (Heath 1996). Looking at literacy from an adult context, Tertiary Commission (2009:58) explains it as “the written and oral language people use in everyday life and work. A person’s literacy refers to the extent of their oral and written language skills and knowledge and their ability to apply these to meet the varied demands of their personal study and work lives.” The description is theoretically established in the following theories of literacy.

Freire’s (1987) Literacy Theory of Conscientisation

One of the important contributors to the development of adult literacy theory was Paulo Freire. He views literacy as a means of critical consciousness for the oppressed and/or marginalised groups. He developed the theory using a Brazilian social service setting with focus on conceptualisation of a dominant class that purported to be attempting to ‘help’ those of lower socioeconomic class through literacy education, but who were ultimately working to maintain the status quo of class division. Freire states that the goal of education is to enable the working class to reproduce itself. Thus, through the development of critical consciousness, it is expected that people could choose to construct a new social reality. The theory therefore sets out to develop a collective conscience or collective transformative learning which is expected to develop into a collective social action termed ‘conscientisation.’

However, Bensemann (1998) mentioning three reasons, argues that Freire has had little impact on the adult literacy education scene. These, according to him, include the conservative nature of adult literacy in the country used, the low

level of awareness of the work and the structural nature of adult literacy provision which does not lend itself to Freirean designs. He also reports that there is an adherence to the agenda of funders of adult literacy programmes. In effect, this does not allow for much scope in terms of movement from the agenda or movement into areas of thought that would challenge the status quo.

Mezirow's (1996) Critical Cultural (or Social Practice) Views of Literacy

In this theory, Mezirow (1996) conceptualises literacy as the ability to make meaning from the written word. He sees literacy as a critical cultural or social practice and believes that making meaning from texts involves transformative practices, where prior understandings and internalised discourses are critically appraised in response to new knowledge. It is therefore noted that a high level of understanding could be the only way within which one can function adequately within the knowledge of world economy.

In summary, Culligan (2005:35), in line with Mezirow, describes what should be the focus of an adult literacy programme as such a one through which all adult learners in it would acquire the ability to understand issues well enough to make discriminating judgments about them. The participants are expected to be able to interpret, judge, solve problems, be self-directed and learn how to be literate adults and responsible citizens in the society.

Autonomous Model of Literacy (Functional Literacy)

In the autonomous literacy theory championed by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), literacy is viewed alongside numeracy skills as the means by which people are equipped with the basics to build on for learning throughout life

(Bynner 2002). Citing Street (1984), MacLachlan and Cloonan (2003) mention that the model of literacy has four ideas that: literacy can be removed from its social context and treated as a skill devoid of social meaning; literacy development or skill level can be traced in a single direction (i.e. literacy can be measured in terms of levels of capability); there are strong associations between literacy levels and social progress; and there are strong associations between higher literacy skills and higher cognitive abilities.

This shows that absence of these ‘basics’ will result in restriction of certain opportunities like acquiring qualifications to secure employment and putting at stake global economic competitiveness of industries. Therefore, enhancement of literacy skills (defined in a functional and autonomous sense) can lead to enhancement of employment opportunities, higher skilled employees for the industry’s benefit and better socioeconomic conditions for the individuals involved. Frank (2003) exemplifies this in a United Kingdom survey of skills needs of employers with a result that there is mainly a lack in the areas of management skills, general communication skills, personal skills such as motivation, and computer literacy.

21st Century View of Literacy

In the 21st century, the concept of literacy, especially for optimal effectiveness among the adults, has shifted from the narrow perspective it used to have. In the contemporary therefore, it is considered broadly to include some technical platforms, modalities and symbol systems which Gee (1999) and Street (2003) refer to as “new Literacy Studies.” It is also construed as understanding effect of digital media and the internet (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear and Leu 2009, Gee 2004 and New London Group, 1996) based on some socially developed

and patterned ways of using technology and knowledge to achieve tasks (Scribner and Cole 1981). It follows then that ability to write or read printed paper alone is not enough to cope with what is required to be literate in the modern world.

Thus, Lewis (2009) identifies some essential skills that help people (i.e. adults) perform the tasks required by their occupation (or desired occupation), provide a foundation for learning other skills, and enhance people's ability to innovate and adapt to workplace change. These skills include reading, document use, writing numeracy, oral communication, working with others, computer use, and continuous learning.

This suggests that an adult is not sufficiently literate without the knowledge of computer use – a predominant factor for achieving the 21st century communication skill.

This is buttressed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the publication, *Digital Transformation: A Learning Framework for ICT Literacy* (2007), to include:

- collect and/or retrieve information
- organise and manage information
- evaluate the quality, relevance, and usefulness of information
- generate accurate information through the use of existing resources

The Northern Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) also considers the competence as achieving learning through digital age literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication and high productivity, meaning that societies

now demand that everyone should have these skills, not just be part of educated elite (Eisenkraft 2009).

In another development, the Pacific Policy Research Centre (2010) puts it that the modern day education about learning communication skills demands social relations and global economic calls that depend on a much more diverse set of communication and collaboration skills. Therefore, the adults, who learnt in the period when development of communication skills centred on fundamentals of achieving good communication through speech writing and reading only, will need to develop themselves through adult learning processes to overcome the challenges of the 21st century communication skills. On that note, today's adults who desire to be efficient in the modern world global communication skills should be able (among many other things) to utilise multiple media and technologies as well as know how to enable them judge their effectiveness and impact. As such, undergoing adult literacy is not limited to adults who are struggling to learn the traditional reading and writing skills. It also affords the educated, especially in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State and Nigeria in general, the opportunity of being relevant and efficiently useful in the contemporary world.

Theoretical framework

Although several literacy theories have been propounded to address issues on literacy in general and adult literacy in particular, the *Autonomous Model of Literacy (Functional Literacy)* is adopted as a theoretical model for this work. This is considered necessary because of the basics the theory provides as a platform for building learning for a functional and lifelong activity. In line with coping with the 21st century communication skills, the theory creates an avenue for the adults, who were

exposed only to the form of education in which development of communication skills specifically focused on the rudiment of achieving good communication through speech writing and reading, to avail themselves with the form of education that is socially developed and patterned on different ways of using technology and computer knowledge to achieve communicative tasks.

Methodology

Research Design and Instrument

The study is a descriptive research design of a survey type. The instrument used is a questionnaire. Percentages were also used to analyse the data.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

An expert in Test and Measurement ascertained the face validity of the instrument.

Sources of Data Collection

The sources of data collected for this work are fifty selected educated individuals with academic certificates that fall between National Diploma (ND) and PhD in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State.

Population

The population covers some secondary school teachers, lecturers of higher institutions, local government employees and civil servants in the local government.

Sampling Procedure

Random sampling was used in gathering the data. The data was therefore directly collected through the use of questionnaire. The questionnaire contained questions that deal with possessing computer (of any kind) including general abilities of using computer to process, access or evaluate data and communicate with the data via the internet. Fifty copies of

the questionnaire were produced and randomly distributed to individuals who have possessed academic qualifications that fall between National Diploma (ND) and PhD. Eventually, the data received were analysed on a percentage basis. Thus, the sampling procedure used was representative.

Data presentation and discussion

The presentation is in two parts. The first part provides some personal data on sex and educational qualifications of the respondents while the second part forms a general representation of responses of the respondents, all presented on a percentage basis.

Section A

1. Sex

SEX	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
MALE	20	40
FEMALE	30	60
TOTAL	50	100

The table above shows that 20 male respondents which translate to 40% were involved while 30 female respondents which translate to 60% of total number of 50 respondents in percentage.

2. Educational Qualification

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
ND	-	-
NCE	8	16
HND	5	10
BA/BSC	30	60
PGD	3	6
MA/MSC	1	2

PhD	3	6
TOTAL	50	100

From the table above, it shows that 30 respondents had BA/BSC which is 60% of total respondent, 8 respondents had acquire NCE with 16%, 5 respondents had HND with 10%, 3 respondents had PGD which corresponds to 6%, 3 respondents had PhD which is 6%, 1 respondent had MA/MSC with 2%, while 0 had OND with 0%.

Section B

1. Do you own your desktop/laptop/handheld computer?

DESKTOP/LAPTOP/HAN DLED COMPUTER	RESPONDEN TS	PERCENTA GE (%)
YES	27	54
NO	23	46
TOTAL	50	100

The table above shows that 27 respondents say (YES) which translate to 54% of total respondents while 23 respondents say (NO) with 46% of total respondents.

2. Do you own any computer application certificate?

COMPUTER APPLICATION CERTIFICATE	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	18	36
NO	32	64
TOTAL	50	100

The table above shows that 18 respondents say (YES) which translate to 36% of total respondents while 32 respondents say (NO) with 64% of total respondents.

3. Did you undergo any college course(s) that exposed you to the use of the internet?

COLLEGE COURSE(S)	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
YES	21	42
NO	29	58
TOTAL	50	100

The table above shows that 21 respondents say (YES) which corresponds to 42% of total respondents while 29 respondents say (NO) with 58% of total respondents in percentage.

4. In what computer applications are you proficient (Microsoft Word, Power Point, Excel, CorelDraw

COMPUTER APPLICATIONS	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
4	13	26
3	7	14
2	3	6
1	17	34
0	10	20
TOTAL	50	100

The table above shows that 13 respondents indicates 4 applications which translate to 26% of total numbers of respondents in percentage 7 respondents indicate 3 applications with 14%, 3 respondents indicate 3 applications with 14%, 3 respondent indicate 2 applications with 14%, 3 respondents indicate 2 applications with 6%, 17 respondents indicate 1 application with 34% while 10 respondents indicate 0 application with 20% of total number of respondents in percentage.

5. What is your typing speed on the computer

TYPING SPEED	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
FAST	6	12
MODERATE	21	42
SLOW	18	36
ZERO	5	10
TOTAL	50	100

From the table above, 6 respondents indicate their typing speed as fast which translate to 12% of total number of respondents in percentage, 21 respondents indicate their typing speed as moderate with 42%, 18 respondents indicate their typing speed as slow with 36% while 5 respondents indicate their typing speed as zero with 10% of total numbers of respondents in percentage.

6. How many times in a week do you access the internet for social media activities

INTERNET ACCESS	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
20+	8	16
16 – 19	4	8
11 – 15	8	16
6 – 10	11	22
1 – 5	12	24
0	7	14
TOTAL	50	100

The table above shows that 8 respondents indicate 20+ times in a week which translate to 16% of total number of respondents in percentage, 4 respondents indicate 16-19 times in a week with 8%, 8 respondents indicate 11-15 times in a week with 16%, 11 respondents indicate 6-10 times with 22%, 12 respondents

indicate 1-5 times with 24% while 7 respondents indicate 0 time with 14% of total number of total respondents in percentage.

7. How regularly do you use digital technology (email, the internet, cell phones, etc.) to collaborate with other users on academic issues?

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
VERY REGULARLY	6	12
REGULARLY	20	40
ONCE IN A WHILE	21	42
NOT AT ALL	3	6
TOTAL	50	100

The above table shows that 6 respondents used digital technology very regularly which translate to 12% of total number of respondent in percentage, 20 respondents used digital technology regularly which translate to 40%, 21 respondents used digital technology which translate to 42%, 3 respondents used digital technology which translate to 6% of respondents.

8. How good are you in downloading and reading material on a desktop or laptop computer through the internet?

DOWNLOADING AND READING MATERIAL	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
VERY GOOD	11	22
GOOD AVERAGE	25	50
SOMEHOW	10	20
NOT GOOD AT	4	8

ALL		
TOTAL	50	100

From the above, 11 respondents are very good in downloading and reading material with 22%, 25 respondents are good in downloading and reading material with 50%, 10 respondents are somehow in downloading and reading material with 20% while 4 respondents are not good at all in downloading and reading material with 8% of total respondents.

9. How often do you seek a help in using the internet?

INTERNET HELP	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
ALWAYS	6	12
OCCASSIONALLY	36	72
NOT AT ALL	8	16
TOTAL	50	100

The table above shows that 6 respondents always seek internet help which 12% in percentage, 36 respondents occasionally seek internet help with 72%, while 8 respondents not at all seek internet help with 16% of total respondents.

Findings

This work examined communication skills in the 21st century with an insight into adult literacy achievement in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State. It acknowledges the true existence of the traditional concept of literacy which has ability to read and write as its focus. It also recognises the emergence of new literacy studies which centre on modern day technological communication skills. It is based on the acknowledgement and recognition the work moves on to identify relevant ways technological communication skills can help achieve adult literacy in the 21st century in Abeokuta South

Local Government Area of Ogun State. In the light of the above, the following findings were made.

1. The study finds that the knowledge of the traditional literacy alone of some educated adults of Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State is not sufficient to cope efficiently with the 21st century communication challenges. It thus reveals that this group of people will need to acquire the modern day technological communication skills to complement the knowledge of the traditional communicative literacy skills (of only reading from and writing in papers) they have already acquired or learnt.
2. It is found out in the study that through adult literacy, technological communication skills can be used in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State to access, analyse, evaluate, communicate and use information to solve problems by availing the adults, who have only been exposed to the form of education in which development of communication skills only focused on fundamentals of achieving good communication through speech writing and reading, with the form of education that is socially developed and patterned on ways of using technology and computer knowledge to achieve communicative tasks.
3. The study also identifies several ways through which the acquisition of technological communicative skills can foster adult literacy in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State to include:
 - i. transformation of learning through collective social media activities.
 - ii. establishing self-reliant adults who will be able to interpret, judge, solve problems and more responsible

citizens in the society through easy and prompt access to information.

- iii. enhancement of literacy skills to make the adults more functional and higher skilled individuals.

Conclusion

The study is on *Communication Skills in the 21st Century: An Insight into Adult Literacy Achievement in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State*. Based on the findings, the work confirms that in the study of literacy, new literacy studies have emerged and this has affected adult literacy globally and educated adults in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State specifically. It is also reflected in the study that in recent time, it is not enough to be educated and acquire certain academic certificates. Thus, for any literate or learned individual to cope maximally with the 21st century technological communicative skills, such an individual will need to be informed or trained. From the findings of the study therefore, it is gathered that many educated individuals in Abeokuta South Local Government are not fully literate with a good number of them in the process of learning when it comes to technological communication skills achievement. The work then concludes that like other aspects of education, literacy (especially from the perspective of the modern day computer related communication skills) is a lifelong learning and individuals should be conscious of this so as to ensure that they are relevant in the contemporary society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the study, it is recommended that

- educated individuals who are not competent in computer application skills endeavour to upgrade themselves in the

skills so as to be relevant in the contemporary world of electronic communication.

- employers make it mandatory for their employees to undergo trainings through which they will be computer literate and thereby make them more efficient especially in the 21st century communication skills.
- curriculum planners ensure that it is not only the theoretical aspect of computer skills that is taught in schools but also ensure that the practical aspect of it is made possible to all learners.
- government and private individuals assist in providing computer system at affordable prices.
- internet facilities be provided at different schools, higher institutions of learning and offices so as to provide an avenue where social interactions, using technological skills, will be possible.

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