

FUTURISTIC SOFT SKILLS FOR JOB MARKET SUCCESS: A STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF KARACHI

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the soft skills needed for the future labour market and to find out how teachers felt about the methods used to assess futuristic soft talents. To fully comprehend instructors' perspectives and experiences, a qualitative phenomenological study design was employed. While evaluation procedures were investigated using two focus groups with seven teachers chosen through purposive sample, the skills needed for the labour market were determined by analyzing prior research publications. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. The results showed that the three main soft skills needed for future employability are emotional intelligence, teamwork, AI and digital readiness, and effective communication abilities. These abilities were thought to be crucial for empowering students to interact with others, use digital tools with assurance, communicate effectively, and adjust to the demands of a changing workplace. The results also demonstrated that standard written exams are insufficient for evaluating soft abilities. As a result, educators recommended project exhibitions, daily reflective journals, and regular rubric-based observation as efficient methods for evaluating futuristic soft skills. According to the study's findings, higher education institutions must incorporate future-focused soft skills into their teaching and learning strategies and evaluate them using performance-based, reflective, and authentic approaches.

Keywords: *Futuristic Soft Skills, Effective Communication, Emotional Intelligence, Higher Education, Assessment Strategies, Teachers.*

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1. Introduction

In the context of the global economy of today employability is not solely based on academic qualifications or subject specific knowledge. Digital transformation, artificial intelligence, automation, global competition and changing organisational structures have all increased the demand for graduates who can communicate professionally, use digital technologies effectively and work productively with others. Recent international studies indicate that employers increasingly seek graduates with a balanced mix of technical knowledge and transferrable soft skills. Such skills help graduates adapt to changing work conditions, work in teams, solve practical problems and maintain professional relationships. In a systematic review, Vlachopoulos (2026) found that communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability, and networking and leadership are repeatedly identified as essential employability skills across disciplines and labour-market sectors. Likewise, Pérez Zúñiga et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of incorporating employability into higher education via competency-based teaching, authentic learning contexts, and assessment practices that foster communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

The demand for soft skills is rising worldwide as workplaces become more collaborative and technology-centric. Graduates need to be knowledgeable in their discipline, but also be able to express ideas clearly, conduct professional communication, work in teams and be adaptable in such environments. According to Gerasimova et al. (2025), soft skills are transferrable skills needed for success in any job sector. These include leadership, teamwork, effective communication, self-management, and problem-solving. Their study also noted that soft skills are as important as hard skills as they help productivity, efficiency in the workplace, and career development. Similarly, Kholifah et al. (2025) found that employability skills are important indicators of workforce readiness in Industry 4.0, where digital communication and collaboration are the key factors to develop graduates' digital productivity and innovation.

Digital literacy is another important dimension of graduate employability. Digital platforms, online communication, data handling, digital content creation, artificial intelligence tools and technology-mediated collaboration constitute the backbone of modern workplaces. According to Đorđević et al. (2025) digital skills are increasingly important for employability, as they enable individuals to meet the changing needs of the modern labour market. The cross-sectional analysis of 32 European countries showed that communication and collaboration, digital content creation and digital safety are important in influencing employability. Mhaske et al. (2025) also found that the industries in the middle of the digital transformation journey are witnessing an increasing mismatch between the digital skills required and the digital skills available in the workforce. They suggested industry-aligned curriculum, digital literacy initiatives and targeted skilling to

prepare a future-ready workforce. The findings indicate that digital literacy is no longer a technical skill but a basic employability skill for graduates entering the job market.

From a South Asian perspective, recent studies indicate that developing countries face significant challenges in aligning higher education with the needs of the labour market. Alam et al. (2025) identified significant skills mismatches among graduates in Bangladesh, particularly in advanced technology and digital skills, which impede their sustainable employability in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Chowdhury et al. (2025) also found that the twenty-first-century workforce requires professional communication, email writing, technological proficiency, digital literacy, negotiation skills, and AI/data-related awareness for graduates. The findings of the study are relevant for Pakistan as both countries face similar issues of graduate unemployment, curriculum gaps and weak industry-academia linkage.

The issue of graduate employability in Pakistan is gaining more and more importance as universities are producing graduates who are often not meeting the practical expectations of employers. Recent research in Pakistan suggests a wide gap between academic preparation and industry requirements. (2025) Riaz, Tarar, Tarar, and Arif explored the employability of university graduates in Pakistan and identified significant gaps between academic curricula and industry needs. The findings revealed that technical skills, communication skills, problem solving, digital literacy, practical experience and soft skills were important for employability, while employers were dissatisfied with the graduates' work-readiness. Similarly, Ishaq (2025) examined perceived work readiness in Pakistan of graduates and identified gaps in digital literacy, AI awareness, practical competencies, career guidance and labour-market alignment. The results highlight the need for more robust reforms in the traditional higher education system in Pakistan to equip graduates with the skills needed for a technology-driven job market.

Furthermore, Gulzar (2025) researched the relevance of higher education programmes to the demands of the job market in Pakistan. The study found that academic competencies must be aligned with employability outcomes through curriculum enhancement and increased responsiveness to the labour market. This is particularly important as Pakistani graduates enter a job market that demands professional communication competence, digital workplace competence and socio-interpersonal competence increasingly. Communication competence helps graduates to interact professionally, present ideas and carry out workplace communication tasks. Their digital workplace competence enables graduates to use technology, digital platforms and AI-related tools in modern workplaces. Socio-interpersonal competence enables teamwork, collaboration, adaptability, emotional intelligence and positive relationships at work. Therefore, the present study is based on the need to explore the soft skills required by the job market in the light of previous research especially communication skills, digital

literacy and social skills as key employability demands for graduates in Pakistan as well as in the world.

1.1. Problem Statement

The issue of graduate employability is a serious one in Pakistan, with a large number of university graduates entering the job market lacking the soft skills and practical competencies desired by industry. Universities and colleges offer academic knowledge, but employers want graduates who can demonstrate workplace skills such as communication, digital literacy, teamwork, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, adaptability and professional behaviour. Riaz et al. (2025) reveal that recent studies on Pakistani university graduates' employability indicate a considerable gap in academic preparation for industry needs, particularly in terms of communication skills, digital literacy, practical exposure, and soft skills development. This suggests that graduates may be able to successfully complete their degrees, but may still be underprepared for the real expectations of the labour market.

The Pakistani and global job market is fast changing due to digital transformation, technology-based work, online communication and competitive workplace environments, so there is a need to explore the soft skills required by industry. Employers don't just want degree holders anymore, they want graduates who can communicate professionally, use digital tools, work with others and fit into the organizational culture. Gulzar (2025) noted that the higher education programmes of Pakistan need to be more aligned with the demands of the labour market and employability outcomes. Ahsan et al. (2025) also highlighted the responsibility of the universities to strengthen the link between learning and working through the building of employability and life skills among students. Hence, it is essential to identify the exact soft skills required by the industry to minimise the gap between university education and employment expectations.

In addition to identifying the necessary soft skills, there is a need to explore suitable assessment techniques for measuring these skills in higher education. In many Pakistani universities, assessment is still largely based on written exams and theoretical knowledge. Soft skills such as communication, digital workplace literacy, teamwork, leadership and interpersonal behavior are not assessed systematically. If these skills are not properly assessed then their development is weak too. Recent research from Pakistan reveals the need for more pragmatic, student-centered and workplace-related assessment practices to develop employability skills, rather than relying solely on traditional examinations (Ahsan et al., 2025). Therefore, assessment techniques such as rubric-based observation, project-based assessment, presentations, reflective logs, peer assessment and workplace-based tasks might be more useful for the assessment of students soft skills.

1.2. Research Objectives

1. To identify the soft skills essential for success in the future job market.

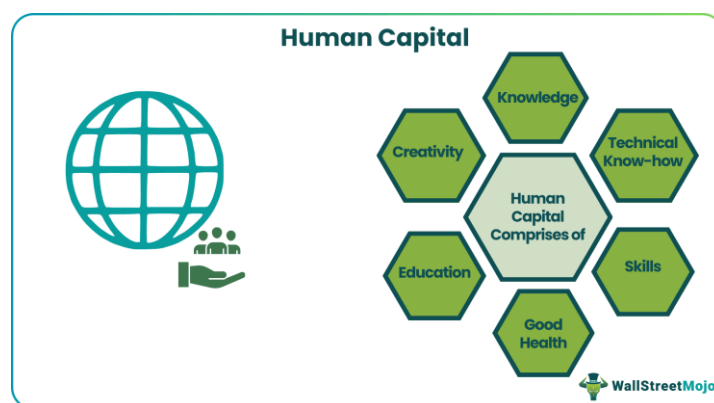
2. To explore the assessment techniques to gauge futuristic soft skills from the lens of teachers.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What are the soft skills preferred by employers in Pakistan?
2. What are the assessment techniques to gauge soft skills from the lens of teachers?

2. Literature Review

Human Capital Theory was mainly developed by Theodore W. Schultz and later expanded by Gary S. Becker. The theory explains that education, training, knowledge, and skills are forms of capital that increase an individual's productivity, employability, and economic value in the labour market. According to Schultz (1961), investment in human abilities through education and training improves the productive capacity of individuals and contributes to economic growth. Becker (1964) further explained that individuals become more valuable in the labour market when they acquire skills and competencies through education and professional development. This theory is closely linked with the present study because the research focuses on exploring the soft skills required by industry and the assessment techniques needed to evaluate those skills in higher education. Skills such as Professional Communication Competence, Digital Workplace Competence, and Socio-Interpersonal Competence can be viewed as important forms of human capital because they improve graduates' readiness for employment and workplace performance. From this perspective, universities have the responsibility to develop and assess these skills so that graduates can meet industry expectations and contribute effectively to the job market. Therefore, Human Capital Theory provides a strong foundation for this study, as it supports the idea that soft-skill development and assessment are essential for improving graduate employability and reducing the gap between higher education and industry demands.



Human Capital Theory

3. Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design to explore the soft skills needed for the future job market and the assessment strategies used to assess future soft skills. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth insights, opinions and experiences from teachers on the development and assessment of soft skills among students. This design contributed to understanding participants' perspectives in a natural and meaningful way.

3.1. Sampling Technique

participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique for the study. The researcher has done this intentionally because the selected teachers have the relevant knowledge, teaching experience and understanding in the development of soft skills of students. The study consisted of seven teachers who were considered suitable participants to provide rich and relevant information related to the research objectives.

3.2. Research Instrument

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was the main instrument of data collection. Two Focus Group Discussions were conducted with seven teachers. The discussions were driven by open-ended questions around skills for the future job market and assessment strategies for soft skills. This instrument provided the opportunity for the teachers to communicate their views, experiences and suggestions in detail and also for interaction and exchange of ideas among the teachers.

3.3. Ethical Consideration

Ethical aspects were carefully considered during the whole research process. Before data collection, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation was confirmed. The identities and responses were kept confidential and the information collected was used for academic and research purposes only. Participants were advised that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without coercion or negative consequences.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is an approach to qualitative research that seeks to identify, analyses and report patterns (themes) within data. The six-phase thematic analysis framework suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied in this study. Phases include familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and names of themes and producing the final report. This method was deemed to be appropriate since the study was to explore future-oriented soft skills.

The analysis of data for the first objective, which was to explore the soft skills required for the future job market, was done through the review of previous research papers. The selected research papers were read carefully and repeatedly to find out the soft

skills emphasized in earlier studies. Suitable statements, repetitions and common findings relating to job market requirements were identified. Then the relevant information was coded according to the skills mentioned in the papers. Like codes were clustered together to form larger categories. This process resulted in three main soft skills. The analysis of previous research papers revealed that communication skills were often mentioned as an essential requirement for the future job market. Communication skills were: clearly expressing ideas, listening well, confidently presenting information and interacting professionally with others. AI and digital readiness was also identified as a core skill for the future workforce. It also involved the ability to use digital tools, online platforms, computer-based technologies and technology-supported communication. The same applied to social skills, which are important because future jobs will require people to work together, establish good relationships, cooperate with other team members, and adapt to different professional settings.

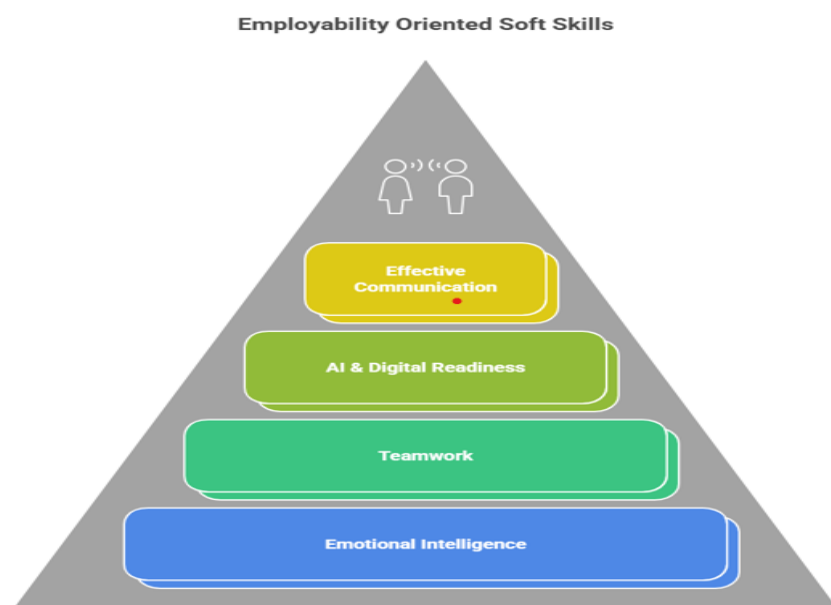
For the second objective, to explore assessment strategies for futuristic soft skills, data were collected through focus group discussions with teachers. A semi-structured focus group discussion approach was adopted because it allowed a guided discussion through open-ended questions, but also allowed participants to freely share their perceptions and experiences in detail. Morgan (1997) suggests that focus group discussion is an effective qualitative method to gather rich data through group interaction whereby participants can respond to one another's views and develop deeper understanding. Krueger and Casey (2015) also state that focus groups are a systematic approach of understanding participants' opinions, experiences and perceptions. Two focus group discussions were held with a total of seven teachers. The responses were transcribed, arranged and read repeatedly to get familiarized with the data. Emphasized were relevant statements related to the assessment of future soft skills. The initial codes were derived from teachers' responses on observation, rubrics, daily reflection, student performance, project work, classroom participation, collaboration, and self-assessment. Similar codes were then categorised and broader themes were developed in line with the research objective. The second major theme to emerge from the focus group discussions was assessment strategies for futuristic soft skills. Teachers' perceptions revealed that traditional written examinations are not enough to measure soft skills as these skills are practical, behavioural and performance based. Therefore, teachers recommended that soft skills should be evaluated through ongoing, authentic and performance-based ways. The main assessment strategies identified were daily reflective logs, project-based assessment and regular rubric-based observation. The regular observation based on rubrics was suggested as an effective strategy to evaluate soft skills of students in classroom and academic activities. Structured observation can be used to assess students' communication, social interaction, teamwork, participation and use of digital tools. Rubrics help make the

assessment process clearer and more systematic by allowing the development of specific criteria for each skill. In this way students' progress can be observed over time on a continuous basis. Also, it was mentioned that the daily reflection logs are an important way to evaluate futuristic soft skills. Students can use reflective logs to write about their learning experiences, challenges, strengths and weaknesses and personal development. These logs help students reflect on their communication, digital learning, teamwork and social behaviour. Students use daily reflective logs for self-assessment as they become more aware of their own progress.

Project exhibition was also identified as another appropriate strategy for assessing soft skills. Students can practice their communication, information and social skills in realistic learning situations through project work. Projects enable students to plan, collaborate, utilise digital resources, solve problems, interact with peers, and share results. Thus project based assessment assesses the process of learning and skill development along with the final product.

The thematic analysis generated two main findings in total. The analysis of previous research papers showed that the major soft skills needed for the future job market are communication skills, digital literacy, and social skills. Second, the focus group discussions with teachers identified regular rubric-based observation, daily reflective logs and project-based assessment as appropriate strategies to assess these futuristic soft skills. Thematic analysis was useful in systematically organizing the data and developing themes that were aligned with the objectives of the study.

5. Discussion



Graphical Representation of Theme 1

5.1. Employability-Oriented Soft Skills

The findings of this study revealed that effective communication, digital activeness, emotional intelligence and teamwork are the key soft skills needed in the future job market. These findings are strongly supported by recent literature showing that future employability depends not only on technical knowledge but also on human-centered and digital competencies. As per the World Economic Forum (2025), 39% of the core skills of workers are likely to change by 2030, emphasising the need for students to be equipped with future-ready skills to meet the changing demands of the marketplace. The report also highlighted the importance of technological literacy, leadership and social impact, empathy, active listening, collaboration, and adaptability as skills for future work (World Economic Forum, 2025). This is consistent with the present finding that communication, digital literacy and social skills are key to future employability.

5.2. Effective Communication

The identification of effective communication skills as an important job market requirement is consistent with recent studies describing communication as a core employability skill. Communication helps students to articulate ideas clearly, present information confidently, listen actively and interact professionally. According to Hussein (2024) soft skills influence employability by improving students' networking skills, negotiation skills and self-promotion skills. Likewise, the World Economic Forum (2025) emphasised that empathy, active listening, leadership, and social influence are important skills in the workplace, suggesting that communication is closely associated with professional success and interaction in the workplace (Hussein, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2025).

5.3. AI Tools and Digital Awareness

This finding is also supported by recent research on digital literacies. Employers are increasingly looking for digital skills, and in particular information and data literacy, problem-solving and digital content creation (Tee et al., 2024). Their research also found that skill gaps often exist for graduates when their digital skills don't match workplace needs. Similarly, Đorđević (2025) pointed out that digital skills positively contribute to employability, especially communication and collaboration, digital content creation, and digital safety skills. These studies support the current finding that digital literacy is no longer an optional skill but a necessary requirement for students entering the future job market (Tee et al., 2024; Đorđević, 2025).

5.4. Emotional Intelligence and Teamwork

The importance of social skills was also clarified through the analysis of the previous research papers. Social skills are teamwork, cooperation, respect, collaboration, interpersonal interaction and the ability to work with diverse people. This is in line with the results from the World Economic Forum (2025) who identified leadership and social

influence as skills growing in importance. It also said employers need workers who can work in teams, adapt and deal with complex social situations. In a literature review on soft skills in higher education, Mohammed et al. (2024) also highlighted that soft skills are crucial for enhancing the employability of graduates, particularly in technology-related fields where technical ability needs to be complemented with teamwork and interaction with others.

As a rule the discussion shows the results of this study are in agreement with the recent research from 2024 to 2026. Communication skills enable students to express and share ideas effectively; digital literacy prepares students to work confidently in technology-rich environments; and social skills enable students to collaborate, cooperate and build positive professional relationships. Hence, these three skills can be viewed as crucial future-oriented soft skills to prepare students for the changing job market (Tee et al., 2024; Hussein, 2024; Mohammed et al., 2024; Đorđević, 2025; World Economic Forum, 2025).

5.5. Theme 2: Evaluation Techniques of the Soft Skills

The study's second major finding was that futuristic soft skills can be assessed through regular rubric-based observation, daily reflective logs and project-based assessment. This finding is supported by recent literature encouraging the use of continuous, authentic and performance-based methods of assessment of soft skills instead of traditional written examinations. Because soft skills are behavioural and practical, their assessment requires methods that allow observation of students' performance, reflection, participation and growth over time.

5.6. Rubric Based Observations

One of the main strategies for soft skills assessment was regular rubric-based observation. This result supports the findings of Suhairom et al. (2024) in their meta-analysis of communication skills assessment and rubrics in higher education. Their research showed that the evaluation of communication skills is complicated and rubrics can help in the more explicit and systematic evaluation of students' performance. Rubrics establish criteria that help teachers to see communication, collaboration, participation and performance in a fair and organized way. Rubrics are also widely used in assessment in higher education (Taylor, 2024) and provide a framework for assessing student learning and performance.

5.7. Reflective Logs

The results on the daily reflective logs are also supported by recent studies on reflection and authentic assessment. Reflective logs enable students to reflect on their own learning, identify strengths and weaknesses and monitor their personal development. Reflective tasks have been highlighted in higher education by Rook et al. (2025) who explain that reflection should be meaningfully embedded into the curriculum. Likewise,

van den Beuken et al. (2025) found that the ability to self-reflect is important to optimise the development and assessment of students' soft skills. This is consistent with the finding of the present study that daily reflective logs can be used to measure students' awareness, communication behaviour, teamwork and personal progress (Rook et al., 2025; van den Beuken et al., 2025).

5.8. Project Exhibitions

Another important strategy found to assess futuristic soft skills was project-based assessment. Project-based assessment is good because it lets students use their communication, digital literacy, collaboration, creativity, and social interaction skills in real-life learning situations. Yulianti (2024) found that project-based learning in higher education can help students to develop soft skills such as collaboration, social awareness, critical thinking, creative thinking, and confidence to present complex information. In addition, Sánchez-García et al. (2025) describe project-based learning as a student-centered and inquiry-based approach that enables students to work on meaningful challenges, making it appropriate for the development and evaluation of 21st-century skills.

These three assessment strategies are also supported by literature on authentic assessment. Vlachopoulos and Makri (2024) argue authentic assessment involves real-world tasks that allow for the evaluation of students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in practical contexts. This is directly relevant to soft skills assessment because communication, digital literacy and social skills are better assessed through performance and practice than through memorisation. Digital technologies are also increasingly employed in authentic assessment in higher education to create tasks that prepare students for real-world contexts (Hu et al., 2025). For this reason, project-based assessment, reflective logs and rubric-based observation are appropriate as they assess students' skills in practical and meaningful ways.

In general, the results show that futuristic soft skills need to be assessed through continuous and authentic assessment practices. Teachers can observe students' behaviour and performance over a period of time through regular rubric based observation. Daily reflective logs help you self-assess and grow personally. Project-based assessment allows students to apply soft skills in real-life learning contexts. The strategies are consistent with recent research that recommends authentic, reflective, rubric-based, and project-based assessment methods to evaluate 21st-century and employability skills (Suhairom et al., 2024; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2024; Yulianti, 2024; Hu et al., 2025; van den Beuken et al., 2025; Rook et al., 2025).

6. Conclusion

The study concluded that future-oriented soft skills are essential in preparing students for the changing job market. Based on the previous research papers, the major

skills required for future employability were identified as effective communication skills, AI tools and digital platforms awareness, emotional intelligence and teamwork.. These skills are important because they help students communicate ideas, use digital tools confidently, work with others, and adapt to professional environments. In addition, findings from the discussions of focus groups revealed that teachers perceived traditional assessment methods as not sufficient to evaluate soft skills. Thus, regular rubric-based observation, daily reflective logs and project exhibitions were suggested as suitable strategies for the assessment of these skills in a continuous and practical manner. Finally, the study highlights the need to incorporate future-oriented soft skills into educational practices and to assess them through authentic, reflective, and performance-based assessment methods.

7. Recommendations

- Higher education institutions should integrate soft skills into regular curricula through presentations, group work, projects, internships, and practical classroom activities.
- Universities should strengthen industry-academia collaboration by involving employers in curriculum review, workshops, guest lectures, internship programs, and employability training.
- Faculty members should be trained to design soft-skill-based learning activities, use assessment rubrics, evaluate teamwork and communication, and provide constructive feedback to students.

8. Funding Declaration

The is part of doctoral research titled "Exploring the Strategies for Cultivating Futuristic Soft Skills in Post Graduate Students: An Inquiry into Higher Education Institutes in Sindh" being carried out by the author at Sindh Madressatul Islam University. No funding agency sponsored the research. The research has been fully carried out by the author himself

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