



Psychological Contract Breach in Nigeria's Educational and Economic Sectors: The Case of Academic Staff Union of the Universities in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to assess the effects of a breach in the psychological contract in Nigeria's education sector and the economy. In doing so, this research examined how a breach in the psychological contract can lead to affective reaction and evaluate the impact the breach has on education and the economy. In addressing the research's aim and objectives, the research draws on data from secondary research methods in the form of Journals, observational data and media recordings. Through carrying out this research, there were a number of key findings which highlighted that failure to honour agreement causes psychological contract breach and this normally result to strike, disruption of academic calendar of public universities in Nigeria; leads to withholding of academic staff salaries; gives academic staff the opportunity to write research publication though, restricts their promotions; affects students' graduation, affects the quality of university products and leads to parents sending their children abroad for study. As a result of these findings, this research suggests the need for ASUU and the Government to go back to negotiation table in order to save the future of young citizens; increase the education allocation percentage in the national budget to revitalise public universities and also honour their agreement with ASUU.

Key words: Psychological contract, employees, education, promises and breach

1. Introduction

Investing in quality education is the highest investment a country can make (UNESCO, 2015). Quality education is important in solving economic, societal and environmental problems (UNESCO, 2015). The knowledge needed in solving all the above-mentioned issues is obtainable in the university. Evidence suggests that university exists in order to transfer knowledge, values, skills, attitudes and norms to learners for better future (Offem, Anashie and Aniah 2018). One thing that will help universities to achieve these goals is to understand and manage psychological contracts of their employees effectively (Rousseau, 2004). This is because psychological contracts shape employee's commitment to their job (Rousseau, 2004).

The psychological contract is important in understanding employment relationship (Cassar and Briner, 2011). It takes place when one party makes contribution and hopes that the other party will reciprocate in the future (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). When there is a breach of the psychological contract it can be disastrous. Conway, Guest and Trenberth (2011) revealed that the breach is more noticeable on employee's job satisfaction, wellbeing and organisational commitment than the fulfilment. Numerous researches showed that breach of psychological contract has negative implications (Kuang-Man, 2013; Tomprou, Rousseau and Hansen, 2015; Hussain, Gul, Usman and Islam, 2016; Reimann and Guzy, 2017). Failure to fulfil psychological contracts lead to reduction in job satisfaction (Bal, Chiaburu and Jansen, 2008), de-motivation which increases employees' turnover; absenteeism as well as decreases commitment and performance (Beardwell, 2007).

It has been argued that unfulfilled promises lead to psychological contract breach (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Rousseau (1989) further suggests that "in a psychological contract, consistency between what is promised ... and what is received is an issue". Research shows that federal government of Nigeria signed agreement with ASUU on different occasions with little or no implementation and it has been causing incessant strike (E-NASS, 2020). However, Bal, et al. (2008) mentioned that when employees' psychological contract is breached it can lead to affective reaction. There is need to know how employees' psychological contract breach can lead to affective reaction and the implication of the breach in Nigeria's education sector and the economy.

Fulfilment of psychological contract is important in working environment. Even though, the impact in organization is not noticeable as the breach, it promotes the relationship between two parties and also encourages trust (Conway et al, 2011). According to Anderson and Schalk (1998), the behaviours which employees normally portray in organization are as a result of their perceived response to their psychological contract. For instance, basic norms such as trust, respect, objectivity, fairness and compassion that take place in organization are component of psychological contract (Manxhari, 2015). The psychological contract was first captured by Argyris (1960) as the relationship that exists between the employer and the employee (s). Levinson, Price, Munden and Solley (1962) went further to explain it as the mutual expectation of the employer and the employee which is not written down but oversees their relationship. This differs from the official contract of employment which consists of expressed terms. It is the unwritten contract, it is known as psychological contract. When there is existence of formal contracts, the informal contracts still emerge when there is expectation.

Nevertheless, Rousseau (1989) definition changed the concept of the psychological contract from employer and employee focus to employee focus only. She defines psychological contract as employee viewpoints in a mutual responsibility between the employee and the employer. Similarly, Robinson and Rousseau (1994, p. 246) see psychological contracts as "a belief in what the employer is obliged to provide, based on perceived promises of reciprocal exchange". The psychological contract is embedded in social exchange theory which explains the employees and employer's relationship as reciprocity of what the duo get (Blau, 1964). Vantilborgh, Bidee, Pepermans, Willems, Huybrechts, and Jegers (2014) suggest that, when an employer fulfils promises made to the employee, the employee will reciprocate by increasing his or her work effort. But, if employees perceive that their employers are not complying with the promises they made, it can lead to breach of psychological contract (Manxhari, 2015).

Psychological contract breach occurs as a result of unfulfilled perceived promises. According to Rousseau (1989) it is failure of organization to treat an employee's contribution the way that satisfies the employee's perception of their organisation's obligation. It is common to breach the psychological contract (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994) and if the psychological contract is breached, the relationship between employer and the employee becomes more calculated (Manxhari, 2015). Consequently, when minor events that on their own are not enough to cause contract breach continue to re-occur, it may set off psychological contract breach (Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro, 2010). However, in most organizations, employers find it difficult to meet up with their obligation (Turnley and Feldman, 1999) because, some of the employers make promises to employees just to attract them into their organization (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994) whereas, some make promises with the intention to carry it out, but are unable to fulfil their promises due to formal policies in their organization (Metz, Kulik, Cregan, and Brown, 2017). Employees' psychological contract breach can have negative implication on both the employer and the employees (Tomprou et al. 2015) as employees may have affective reaction (Bal et al. 2008).

However, the extent to which the psychological contract breach affects employee's emotions depends on the relationship the employee has with employer or the organization (Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro, 2011). If the employee respects, and trusts the employer and the employer fails to comply with the promise he or she made, it can lead to breach of the psychological contract. Research shows that psychological contract breach leads to employees' turnover (Clinton and Guest, 2007). Though, Manxhari (2015) finding argues that there is negative relationship between psychological contract breach and intent to leave the present job. Breach of psychological contracts can increase anger, lead to lack of trust, decrease in job satisfaction and commitment, relationship termination as well as mental ill-health of an employee (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Kuang-Man, 2013; Hussain et al., 2016; Reimann and Guzy, 2017). In other words, breach of the psychological contract can be disastrous.

Research shows that psychological contract breach effects can be long-term and it is hard to restore (Rousseau, 1989, Conway, et al, 2011). But, Tomprou et al. (2015) state that there are chances of repairing relationship following psychological contract breach if employers render sincere apologies, compel promises and offer compensation to employees. Also, Solinger et al. (2015) report that perceived organizational support enhances the chance of psychological contract recovery after breach. Though, Rousseau (1989); Conway, et al. (2011) argue that fulfilment of psychological contract after breach will not restore relationship back to normal as it was before it was breached. When all the things that led to the establishment of the relationship are repeated, it can rebuild trust which will possibly restore relationship (Rousseau, 1989). Although, Solinger et al. (2015) tested a model of post breach psychological contract and found that in the case of reactivation of relationship following psychological contract breach, commitment will stabilize but, will initially reduce based on the breach. Also, they reported that if the psychological contract succeeds subsequent to breach, there is possibility of higher commitment than it was prior to the breach.

Solinger et al. (2015) further state that when an employee is forced to admit situation the way it is, the employee will be less committed and may gradually look for another work. Moreover, if psychological contract cease to exist after breach, it may lead to total withdrawal of commitment. Similarly, employees will minimize their duties and

behave in a manner that shows collapse in the relationship, for example, neglecting job responsibility (Tomprou et al. 2015), embarking on strike in the case of a unionised workplace (Ahmad and Basheer, 2012). Though, Cregan (2013) and McDonald (2000) noted that in the developed countries employees in union have reduced the rate of using strike to show their grievances when there is dispute.

The advantages of quality education cannot be over emphasized. A country that places value in education has planned to succeed in all ramifications. Especially now that “knowledge-based economy has become an engine of progress in every country” (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 2002, pvii). Due to the importance of education, United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) according to PREMIUM TIMES (2017) recommends allocation of 15-20 percent of annual national budget to education. Quality education is a key to successful society. It provides people with the ability to boost their income and avoid poverty, and also with the skills to proffer solutions to environmental challenges (UNESCO, 2015). It prepares one for competitive advantage. However, “The universities exist and play pivotal roles in educating a greater portion of individuals and breed new potentials for action” (Ugar, 2018, p19). They improve cities, neighbourhoods; support anchor institution and broaden students’ education as well as inform and carry forward the larger society (Perry and Menendez, 2010). University reinstates the dignity of human kind. Just as argued by (Offem et al., 2018), university exists in order to transfer knowledge, values, skills, attitudes and norms to learners for better future. However, the knowledge, skills and so on which are obtainable in the university are being conveyed to students by academic staff. Academic staff are the lamp of the universities. They carry out their duties with hope that their organization will reciprocate to their written (legal) and unwritten (psychological) contract. Without expectation of exchange in the future, neither employer nor the employee will make good contribution to each other and their relationship may not exist well (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Academic staff through their union negotiates collectively with their employer concerning their employment contract (Farber, 2001). The main aim of trade union is to ensure that the interest of members is promoted (Uzoh, 2017).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was formed in 1978 during military regime by academic staff of Nigerian federal and state universities across the country. It came into existence from Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) established in 1965. ASUU was formed due to issues such as: poor salary, lack of attention to education and restriction to people’s freedom after colonial administration. In 1980 and 1981, ASUU demanded through industrial action that government should grant academic freedom / autonomy to all Nigerian universities, to increase academics’ salaries by 15%, enhance funding of universities and improve condition of service of employees. Since 1980, ASUU has been struggling to achieve these goals under various governments. Throughout the 1980s, ASUU had a lot of disputes with government such as: fight against retrenchment of employees; rejection of \$120 million loan procurement from World Bank; reinstatement of illegally dismissed ASUU members; the rejection of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and so on.

Furthermore, the union in 1988 embarked on strike demanding Government to grant university autonomy, implement Elongated University Salary Scale (EUSS) and also set up committee for joint negotiation between the two parties. As a result of the strike, the union was proscribed by Babangida’s regime in 1988 and universities were ordered to pay EUSS immediately and the union was later allowed to function in 1990. However, in 1992

ASUU was prohibited again by Abacha's Government when they embarked on another strike and demanded that the government should have serious negotiation with them. The Government later appointed delegates that had negotiation with ASUU. During negotiations, ASUU reached agreement with the Government which included the right to collective bargaining. But, when Government failed to re-negotiate with the union, the union embarked on another strike in 1994 and 1996 asking for re-negotiation of the 1992 agreement and recalling of their leaders that were illegally dismissed in 1980s and 1990s. In 1996, Abdulsalami's Government recalled the union leaders that were dismissed and in 1999 endorsed the 15% increase in the academic salaries. In 2001, Government entered into agreement with ASUU but, non-implementation of the agreement as well as Government's plan to obtain \$68 million loan from World Bank led to declaration of strike by ASUU in 2002. Though in 2003, the strike was suspended. In 2009, ASUU embarked on four months strike that made the Federal Government to sign their agreement. On the other hand; Government failed to implement many of their terms which includes: earned academic allowances, revitalization of public universities and other requests such as rejection of IPPIS by ASUU. Promises made to employees' form their psychological contract and failure to fulfil the promises lead to their psychological contract breach which in turn results to lack of job satisfaction and negative attitude towards their organization (Kuang-Man, 2013). Just as noted by Kuang-Man (2013), ASUU has been having incessant strike since 2009 till date just to make sure that Government honoured their agreement.

To summarize, Federal Government of Nigeria signed agreements with ASUU on several occasions without implementing some of the agreements and this has been causing industrial action. However, the reviewed literatures show that unfulfilled promises result to psychological contract breach. Since Government did not honour the agreement reached with ASUU, Government has breached the psychological contract of ASUU members. Nevertheless, research shows that when the breach occurs, employees will behave in a way which will show termination in the relationship between them and their employer. Similarly, it was revealed that when psychological contract of employees is breached it may cause affective reaction. Little is known about how a breach in the psychological contract can lead to affective reaction and what the impact of the breach will be on educational and economic sector.

2. Objectives of Study

Due to the importance of education in human development, this research aims to explore the effects of a breach in the psychological contract in Nigeria's educational and economic sector. In facilitating this aim, the following objectives were developed:

- To explore how a breach in employees' psychological contract led to affective reaction.
- To investigate the resultant effects of psychological contract breach in Nigeria's education sector and the economy.

This research will be guided by these questions:

- How can a breach in employees' psychological contract lead to affective reaction?
- What are the resultant effects of psychological contract breach in Nigeria's education sector and the economy?

3. Materials and Methods

Data was gathered from documentary sources. The data was generated through the internet, quality newspapers, journals, observational data and media recordings. Moreover, the researcher made use of disguised naturalistic observations in and outside academic environment which helped in forming basis of analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

This research was set to examine how a breach in the psychological contract can lead to affective reaction and evaluates the resultant effect of psychological contract breach in Nigeria's education sector and the economy. Just as many researchers have described, psychological contract breach is one of the things that have a negative impact in organizations. This is because it can lead to de-motivation which increases employees' turnover; absenteeism as well as decreases commitment and performance (Beardwell, 2007). Though, this study did not find anything about turnover, it shows that psychological contract breach can occur as a result of unfulfilled agreement and it can lead to strike, decrease in commitment and performance. The findings are discussed below.

Strike

What is happening between Federal Government of Nigeria and ASUU correlate with Beardwell (2007) report which mentioned absenteeism decreases in commitment and performance as consequences of psychological contract breach. Each time Government fail to fulfil promises made to academic staff, it results in industrial action that causes a lot of negative impact in the country. It was observed that strike is one of the consequences of psychological contract breach in Nigerian universities. Strike can be seen as the refusal of employees to carry on their duties due to grievances. It is one of the means employees use to show dissatisfaction. Employees do not just embark on strike without bone of contention. For instance, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria are currently on strike, this is as a result of the breach of the academic staff trust by the Nigerian Government through non-implementation of agreement it signed with ASUU in 2009. Although, academic staff's refusal to join Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) further deteriorated the relationship the union has with the Government (Vanguard 2020b).

Even though, Government suggests that IPPIS will help to curb corruption as well as save cost in the country if it is implemented (Atueyi, 2020). ASUU argues that IPPIS will infringe university autonomy which was granted in 2009 and also affect lecturing visitation (Goronyo, 2020; Atueyi, 2020). However, since the inception of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, ASUU has embarked on strike more than fifteen times due to Government's failure to sign and fulfil promises made to academic staff. Evidence shows that from 1999 to July 2020, ASUU have spent about 41 months striking in order to get Government fulfil her promises (Adedigba, 2018, 2019). More so, observation shows that academic staff has refused to call off the current strike until Government implements their agreements. They have come to understand that Government at times renege on the promise they made through memorandum of action to resolve the issue that is causing strike within a notable time. This is in-line with Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro (2010) report that when minor events that on their own are not enough to cause contract breach continues, it may set off psychological contract breach.

Despite the fact that Federal Government promised to pay the earned academic allowance, the union insisted in getting bank alert before calling off the strike due to lack of trust. Without trust, it will be difficult to solve problem. Just as Robinson and Rousseau (1994) noted, lack of trust reduces cooperation and communication. This is in-line with Beardwell (2007) and Hussain et al. (2016) argument that when psychological contract is breached, there will be negative reaction such as lack of trust, lack of commitment and satisfaction by employees.

Nevertheless, it was observed that psychological contract breach has effect on academic staff. For example, on many occasions when ASUU shows that the psychological contract of its members has been breached through strike, Government would withhold academic staff salaries as a way of reminding them of “no work no pay policy”. ASUU strike of the year 2018 and 2020 support the above claim. Similarly, according to Vanguard (2020), ASUU President Prof. Biodun Ogunyemi made this statement “the Nigerian Government has chosen to use hunger as a weapon of war against its academics and we are not going to sit and watch”. “No Work No Pay is a rule by the Federal Government of Nigeria which states that any employee that goes on strike will not be entitled to salary for that period strike, since he or she did not work for it. Furthermore, it was also observed that this “No Work No Pay policy” makes life difficult for some of the lecturers who have no other means of survival apart from their monthly pay. Albeit, (Kawugana, 2016) revealed that the withheld academic staff salaries are being paid after a while.

However, the after-effect of this might be that when strike is resolved, some of the lecturers may not dedicate to go extra miles in teaching the students due to what they have passed through such as lack of money to feed their family. They may amend their behaviour (how they deliver their duty) so that, it will tally with how they feel their employer treated them. This is in-line with Bal et al. (2009) report that if employees feel that their employer is partially or totally not responding to obligation and agreement, the employees will reciprocate by minimizing their contribution in their job. Just as Rousseau (1989) findings suggest, psychological contract breached cannot be repaired easily.

Nevertheless, there is every tendency that “No Work No Pay Policy” will make it difficult for academic staff to attend conferences. However, further research is required to establish a link between this. This will have effect on academic staff promotion because conference proceeding is one of the criteria used in promotion of academic staff (Atanda, and Olasupo, 2018). Research also shows that psychological contract breach affects ASUU members’ advancement and appointment. For example, report from Ajayi (2020) shows that ASUU Ibadan branch demanded that their university should withdraw all the promotions and the appointments made during the 2020 ASUU strike because the promotions and the appointments were alleged to be illegal.

Though, psychological contract breach has positive effects as well. It was observed that during strike, a lot of lecturers normally have time to increase their research publications. Academic staff promotions depend on their research publications (Atanda, and Olasupo, 2018). Also, on several occasions that ASUU has embarked on strike, Government fulfilled some of their promises. For instance, Government was able to re-negotiate and sign ASUU’s demand in 2009 due to academic staff industrial action that lasted for four months. More so, according to ASUU memo dated 24th June 2019 and signed by ASUU President Prof. Biodun Ogunyemi, Government remitted N25 billion to federal universities in 2019. N20 billion out of the N25 billion were part-payment of the arrears of Earned Academic Allowances (EAA).

Educational Effects

Whenever ASUU and Federal Government relationship get soured due to psychological contract breach, it affects academic calendar of Nigerian universities. For instance, the Vice-Chancellor of University of Ibadan (UI) Professor Olayinka's statement during 2018 convocation ceremony of University of Ibadan shows that final year students of the university did not join convocation ceremony due to disruption of academic calendar caused by psychological contract breach (National Universities Commission Monday Bulletin, 2018). Furthermore, evidence suggests that as a result of disruption in academic calendar, course outlines are rarely covered before examination (Offem, et al. 2018). Hon. Julius Ihonvbere a representative of Owan Federal Constituency on the 10th of March, 2020 argues that the disruption of academic calendar in turn affects the quality of university products (E-NASS, 2020). Additionally, Offem, et al. (2018) also stated that disruption of academic calendar has impact in the academic planning of Nigeria universities. However, it was observed that, sometimes after disruption of academic calendar, course contents are usually compressed and students' programme normally last longer than expected. More so, observation shows that the resultant impact of psychological contract breach affects students in many ways. For instance, during strike, most students engage in different activities (e.g.: loitering on the street with friends, playing games and so on) that are not related to their academic activities. All these non-academic activities may make it difficult for students to increase their knowledge through academic learning processes. Consequently, it makes some students to forget the knowledge they gained during academic session (Monogbe and Monogbe, 2019). Similarly, evidence suggests that students perform better when schools are on than during strike (Goronyo, 2020). All these may contribute to why Hon. Julius Ihonvbere a representative of Owan constituency states that:

'... the kind of students we are producing as graduates due to strike will become worse than Boko Haram in the near future, because they will become good at almost nothing and when you force them into the system and give them jobs, they will damage the entire administrative, political and planning processes... (E-NASS, 2020)

Effect on Economy

Quality education leads to competitive advantage in the global market (Ibrahim, 2015). Due to the importance of education, UNESCO recommended that developing countries should devote 15% – 20% of their national budget to education (PREMIUM TIMES, 2017). In 2019 budget, 7% of the national budget was mapped out for education and in 2020, about 7.05% is being budgeted for education. The above figures are far below 15% – 20% which UNESCO recommended. However, due to Government failure to honour agreement made with ASUU, the employees' psychological contract was breached and it led to the union members going on strike. It is likely that the recommended figure may have helped Government to honour their agreement with ASUU on time without breaching the members' psychological contract. One of the reasons ASUU is embarking on strike is because of Government's failure to revitalize (*i.e.* stock libraries, equip laboratories and workshop, and so on) Nigerian public institutions (Lawal 2020) as they promised in 2009 agreement so that students can have access to quality education. Nevertheless, as a result of academic staff psychological contract breach caused by Government's failure to fulfil

the promises made to academic staff in 2009, foreign student (s) may find it difficult to patronize Nigerian public Universities.

Instead, many Nigerian parents who can afford to sponsor their children's education abroad send them overseas to obtain quality education within the planned academic calendar because Nigeria school calendar normally last longer than planned. Mick Howarth "A British Higher Education Specialist and Director-General of Global Education Study Centre" statement support the above claim. In his comment, he articulated his disappointment over the high number of Nigerian students that travel overseas to obtain university education due to decrease in the standard of Nigerian higher education (Eseaga, 2018). This is also evidenced in Lawal (2020) report that US plans to repatriate about 16,000 Nigerian students from United States following Corona Virus pandemic. He emphasized that in 2019, Nigeria had about 16,039 students in the US which was the highest figure from Sub-Saharan Africa compared to 12,693 students that was documented in 2018. In other words, the number of people moving to foreign country to obtain quality education is increasing every year.

Research also showed that Nigerian students studying in the US in 2018 contributed about \$514 million to the US economy (Lawal, 2020). This may be a disadvantage to Nigerian economy. This is why ASUU President Prof. Biodun Ogunyemi states that foreign countries are funding their universities with Nigerian resources (Lawal, 2020). Nevertheless, when academic staff psychological contract is breached, it results in ASUU strike which in-turn increases the rate of unemployment as well as the number of people who are financially dependent. For instance, Monogbe and Monogbe (2019) report that, ASUU incessant strike deprive some students the opportunity of getting job which age determines the entry level.

Psychological contract breach hampers national growth and development especially now that knowledge is what is boosting many countries economy. It was reported that in some Nigerian Universities, some Academics produced technological equipment to support what Nigeria has in order to curb Corona Virus pandemic. For instance, the Faculty of Engineering, Bayero University Kano and University of Benin fabricated ventilators to help patients that are finding breathing difficult (BUSINESS DAY, 2020). Also, in Lagos State University, the Department of Computer Science constructed a mobile app that can enable self-check of Corona Virus. In contrast, observations show that many academic staff in other universities would have joined in finding solution to this deadly disease if not for the issue they have with the federal government that resulted to taking hold of their salary. Some were more interested on how to feed their family than on how to find solution to the deadly disease.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that failure to honour promises lead to psychological contract breach which as a result leads to strike. Strike has effects on both Nigeria's education sector and the economy. Psychological contract breach effect which includes lack of trust, non-payment of salary, disruption of academic calendar, change in commitment, negative effect on students and negative effect on economy need to be avoided in order to have quality education in Nigeria.

ASUU and the Government should endeavour to go back to negotiation table in order to save Nigerian public tertiary institutions as well as the future of young citizens from the effects of psychological contract breach. Also, Government should try and do her

part after signing an agreement in order to avoid strike, due to the enormous disadvantages associated with strike action.

When planning budget, Government should make sure that at least 12% to 15% of the national budget is allocated to education to enable her implement any agreement reached with ASUU and redeem her trust by the employees so as to avoid psychological contract breach.

Ensuring that academic calendar of Nigeria public universities are stable will have positive impact on citizens and on Nigeria's economy because people will be spending their money in Nigerian universities instead of spending it abroad.

Government should come up with a strategy on how to live up to their agreement with ASUU, considering the advantages of sound education system to national growth and development.

Government should sponsor and equip tertiary institution laboratories / workshops and libraries to the best standard, so that students will be learning practical aspects of what they are studying in order to encourage technological development in the country and also reduce the number of students that are travelling abroad to acquire education.

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