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IDENTIFYING THE FACTORS AFFECTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
EDUCATION TO IRAQI STUDENTS FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT

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**ABSTRACT:**

The present study aimed to identify the factors affecting entrepreneurship education for Iraqi students for self-employment using the logic of qualitative methodology. The statistical population of the study included experts, staff and university professors with education related to entrepreneurship and job creation. The sample included 20 members of the community who were purposefully selected based on the snowball method. In this regard, a variety of written library information has been used to compile research literature, including the theoretical foundations of higher education, entrepreneurship and self-employment. The results of this study showed that from the perspective of the people in the study community, the components are the mental context of the stakeholders, having the perspective of teaching the skills needed for future jobs, government support for educational centers, and the capacity of teachers to train students. Use of appropriate teaching methods, appropriate content of relevant textbooks, availability of facilities for teaching skills to educators, support of culture, community, university, school and family, improvement of economic and technological infrastructure, and rate of use He considered it one of the new educational strategies of successful countries.

## INTRODUCTION

The education system is the key to national development (Maina, 2014). No country can guarantee endogenous and sustainable development without proper higher education and research institutes to educate skilled individuals. Therefore, suitable higher education is the heart of any country to ensure progress in daily life (Mahmud, 2013). Higher education plays a major role in society because it creates new knowledge, transmits it to students, and fosters creativity and innovation. Higher education institutions are key players in the production and dissemination of knowledge through research and education, and therefore have a special social responsibility in fostering civic values and civic participation. They also produce the human capital demanded by employers in the labor market and considered vital to socio-economic development (Masri and Wilkens, 2011). According to Akuma and Emesin (2017), education provides one the opportunity to adapt to changes in society. In other words, it is a vital tool enabling individuals to meet the challenges of society and life. These challenges are related to livelihood requirements for becoming a better and more useful citizen for oneself and the whole society (Nij, 2020).

With more than 8,000 years of recorded history, Iraq has been a pioneer among Arab countries in terms of the quality of its social programs. However, it has in recent years faced a range of conflicts that have led to the rapid and comprehensive decline of its basic infrastructure and social services (Mahmud, 2013). One of the fundamental areas that has suffered irreparable damage is the education system of this country. Having been plagued by a number of conflicts, including the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Persian Gulf War (1991-1999), and sanctions imposed on Saddam Hussein<sup>1</sup>'s regime, the US invasion of Iraq (2003) and their long-running unrest, the Iraqi education system has been dealing with a plethora of challenges concerning education (Dickson and Ladefoged, 2017; Drew and Mackie, 2011; Mahmud, 2013). Among the challenges facing its education system are weaknesses in various areas such as infrastructure, quality of the education system, academic staff and qualification of the faculty members, textbooks, scientific research and publications, educational institutions and labor markets, public educational institutions, educational staff and quality of graduates (Mahmud, 2013).

The legacy left over from these years of neglect to improve the education system is the profound challenges of unemployment that have plagued the Iraqi people, so that high rates of unemployment have become one of the main socio-economic concerns in this (Aziz, 2014). According to experts, one of the main strategies to reduce unemployment is to improve the educational infrastructure and increase the self-employment skills of university graduates; EE can be very helpful in this regard (Oyelola, Igwe, Ajiboshin and Peluola, 2014). EE can be considered a basic need to make society get rid of the unemployment problem, because EE, along with other educational topics in universities, is a kind of guide to the production and employment cycle. By training university students how to create and manage a business, EE takes a fundamental and important step towards preparing them to enter the business world (Abereijo, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> . Saddam Hussein held the office of President of Iraq from 1979 to 2003.

Inattention to EE in universities causes most university graduates to lack the knowledge, attitude and skills necessary to create employment and work in the market. This makes it impossible for students to create jobs for themselves or find a job related to their field of study, or causes them to lose their jobs due to poor skills. Although there have been efforts to rapidly develop higher education in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and in Iraq in particular over the past few years, most governments have failed to provide high-quality education that can provide the graduates with the knowledge, attitudes and skills required in the job market. In other words, despite the increased number of students in recent years, universities have failed to play their role in society properly and successfully, at least in terms of providing skilled and specialized graduates (Atrushi and Woodfield, 2018).

New challenges, the accelerated speed of change, increased influential factors and more sophisticated content have increased the need to pave the way for nurturing skilled, professional, creative and entrepreneurial workforce, and have emphasized the need to focus on higher education. Therefore, maintaining the quality of higher education requires strategic and thoughtful planning and continuous analysis of environmental changes. Given that in the modern knowledge-based societies, the quality of higher education and the scientific system has become a strategic issue for the survival, development and territorial sovereignty of nations, ensuring the proper governance of the country, futurism and quality in higher education involve developing and strengthening the factors affecting EE to students for self-employment and planning, which involves identifying and analyzing these factors. It can be concluded that solving the problem of unemployment, creating and strengthening employment and self-employment strategies, and moving towards all-inclusive development of society has highlighted the need to train skilled, entrepreneurial, efficient and creative individuals. This requires universities' paying attention to EE as a pivotal function alongside education and research, provide the basis for student employment and facilitating the self-employment process after graduation. Therefore, the present study seeks to identify the factors affecting the EE of Iraqi students for self-employment in order to identify the factors affecting EE and highlight the most important of these factors in order to create and develop them during the academic education of Iraqi students.

### ***Importance and Necessity of the Research***

Unemployment is nowadays one of the major problems and challenges in Iraqi society, rooted in the young job seekers' lack of knowledge, attitude and skills. Getting rid of the problem of unemployment depends on changing the culture of employment, promoting active education and encouraging the youths to acquire this education. It is difficult to achieve employment in all areas without entrepreneurial skills and vocational training. Strengthening the EE skills is an important way to get a job and needs to be promoted more than ever before. The application of entrepreneurial knowledge, attitudes and skills in any country stimulates economic growth and social development, and countries that have higher and better standards in these areas can better and more effectively adapt themselves to the challenges, threats and opportunities of the national and international labor market.

The majority of Iraqi youths and university graduates are currently facing unemployment, and the government and officials are emphasizing the need to increase EE for self-employment in order to employ them. Lack of a coherent plan to enhance entrepreneurial skills in universities, enter the labor market and establish business companies to generate new ideas, and plans to implement those ideas actually means massive unemployment for Iraq in the near future. Educating highly capable and skilled manpower in all required specialties of the society is important in creating employment, promoting the organization of investments, creating job opportunities on a large scale, promoting a balanced regional development, reducing the centralization of economic power, creating and distributing wealth, increasing GDP and per capita income, improving the living standards, improving export businesses in the country, facilitating the macro-development process, creating innovation and new jobs, creating positive social changes, improving personal growth and commercializing new ideas (Dhaliwal, 2016).

In the current situation where Iraq is engaged in the crises of war, ISIS and internal conflicts, and transition from the oil-based economy, the Iraqi society needs people with entrepreneurial abilities who can cope with the current challenges of life in this country. Learning entrepreneurship in any economy can bring benefits for society. Therefore, there is a need for EE in the current Iraqi society.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A variety of studies have been conducted to identify the factors affecting EE at the international level, especially in developing countries. Going through the concept of entrepreneurship, we describe these studies and examine the key factors mentioned in the studies.

#### ***Definitions And Concept of Entrepreneurship***

The word "entrepreneurship" was derived from the French word "entreprendre", meaning "undertake". Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines entrepreneur as one who undertakes to organize, manage, and assume the risks of a business. The term "entrepreneurship" was first coined in French, and later became the general concept of entrepreneurship in the modern language (Cochran, 1968). Since the term "entrepreneur" was coined, various definitions of it have been offered based on various perspectives, some of which are presented in the table below:

**Table 1.** Definitions and concept of entrepreneurship

Researcher	Definitions
Richard Contillon (1730)	Richard Contillon was the first to divide economic factors into three categories: (Ahmad Podariani and Moghimi, 2010: 84) Landowners Wage economic agents Economic agents who operate in the stock market by accepting its risk.

Jean-Baptiste Say (1803)	The entrepreneur shifts economic resources out of an area of lower and into an area of higher productivity and greater yield (Prokopenko & Pavlin, 1991).
McClelland (1961)	An entrepreneur is the man who organizes the firm (the business unit) and / or increases its productive capacity. He also introduced the characteristics of an entrepreneur as the need for high success and risk-taking.
Peter Drucker (1985)	Entrepreneurship is exploiting the opportunities to make a change and an <i>entrepreneur</i> is the one who <i>always</i> searches for <i>change</i> , responds to it and exploits it as an <i>opportunity</i> , responding to it, and taking advantage of it as an opportunity.
Robert Hisrich (1985)	Entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychological and social risk; Also receiving financial rewards and personal satisfaction with its results (Hisrich and Peters, 2011).
Chell & Haworth (1988)	Entrepreneurs are people who have the ability to see and evaluate business opportunities, to gather the necessary resources and achieve the benefits obtained from them and can take the right steps to achieve success.

In fact, no complete, comprehensive, and generally-accepted definition of entrepreneurship, had been provided yet, but the theory and definitions of it provided by the famous Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter and the role of entrepreneurs in the development process are agreed upon and referenced by most researchers in this field.

### ***Education And Entrepreneurship***

In general, in addition to positive behavioral changes, education has other effects on increasing productivity and efficiency, social mobility, career advancement, and promoting creativity and innovation (Morris, 2017). Entrepreneurship largely predicts future achievements, and combining it with appropriate specialized education can guarantee an ideal future (Michelacci & Schivardi, 2017). Peter Drucker, one of the most widely-known and influential thinkers on management, says, "Entrepreneurship is not a strange thing, nor is it to be considered a magic and a mystery. It is just a regular and coherent category that has nothing to do with hereditary and congenital issues. It is a science that, like all other well-established sciences, can be acquired and learned" (Zarini and Dehbani, 2009: 27).

EE can be said to includes the development and presentation of educational materials such as knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial attitudes to learners to enable them to identify opportunities that others have overlooked despite its risk, and take actions immediately and start their own business with insight and confidence in places others have hesitated (Hynes, 2003; Reynolds, 1994; Bygrave & Hofer 6, 1991; Mitra & Matlay, 2004). In another definition, it can be said that EE is a continuous and systematic process that leads to the

identification and effective use of all internal and external resources of the educational system on the one hand and creates new teaching-learning opportunities on the other hand. This process is achieved by relying on the two categories of comprehensive entrepreneur education and providing the grounds for its emergence (Yaghoubi Najafabadi, 2010: 28).

### ***Objectives Of Entrepreneurship Education***

Most EE programs follow different objectives. These objectives may be specific or complex. However, the primary objective of entrepreneurship development is to educate people to be self-reliant and aware of opportunities and in general people who are more willing to start independent businesses. Salman et al. performed one of the most comprehensive empirical analyses in EE and categorized it as follows: The main objective of EE is educating the business and how to enter it (Arasti et al., 2010).

EE can be one of the most effective ways to facilitate the transfer of the university graduates to the labor market. Studies in Europe have shown that such education can make individuals more responsible, turn them into entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers, and make them successful and risk-averse in business challenges. As a result, the unemployment rate and business failure will be lower (David Arbano, 2008).

Hilse conducted a study on university educators who teach entrepreneurship and considered the goals of EE to include raising awareness and understanding of the process of starting and setting up a new business, developing a career path, understanding interdisciplinary relationships, and enhancing entrepreneurial skills. The main purpose of EE, from Hilse's point of view, is to nurture and develop entrepreneurial and self-reliant individuals through the learning process. Notably, it is important to determine the pros and cons of career path decisions, preparation strategies, and the time to enter the job for students. In addition, attempts should be taken to develop their analytical skills using new concepts, tools, and methods, and to increase their sensitivity to identifying business opportunities. It is also important to enhance their self-confidence to enable them to try their best in the business with high potential. If education is done in this way, it will promote the culture of entrepreneurship among students and bring socio-economic development and welfare (Khani Jazani, 2009).

The goals pursued in EE programs include training new entrepreneurs and guiding them to business.

### ***Entrepreneurship Education in The University***

To prepare students in the modern world of work, 21st century university entrepreneurship curricula need to focus on personal development so that the learner learns to think and act like an entrepreneur. When we expand the definition of entrepreneur to get its main meaning, we can use this definition as a basis for creating a curriculum and planning that trains an entrepreneurial mindset and enables students to stay competitive throughout their education (Carolis & Litzky, 2019: 60). The importance of EE is undeniable when

previous studies show that it can increase the interest, skills, attitude and culture of entrepreneurship among students (Majid et al., 2019: 2). EE plays a major role in increasing economic growth and students are one of the main players in this sector in making the business environment dynamic (Oconnor et al., 2013). This is why various universities around the world make great efforts to encourage students to be entrepreneurs and to develop and promote entrepreneurial intention and behavior in them (Thomas et al., 2014).

In fact, the entrepreneurial university is a place where new jobs are created. These centers support entrepreneurs. This support includes educational, financial and marketing support. As a result, entrepreneurs have access to libraries and laboratories. Such universities provide opportunities for investors to set up new business centers. They work with entrepreneurs to anticipate their problems and take advantage of opportunities, which is itself a valuable financial and marketing experience. The accumulation of financial resources is of special importance in these universities and they especially need government assistance. Carrying out commercial and economic projects with modern technology is low cost and the optimal use of financial reserves is one of the characteristics of entrepreneurs. Another important point is the demand for activity and providing services in the market. Occupations that benefit from these universities will be pioneers in developing new technologies. These technologies are used in the production of goods and will bring a higher standard of living. The entrepreneurial university must have access to the market and take full advantage of the experience of experienced people in the market. There is also a need for capable, competent, enthusiastic and creative people in such centers.

In these centers, communication between individuals and groups is open, horizontal, and usually informal. Meetings are essential for the exchange of information and activities, and new and creative ideas are welcomed. However, there must be mechanisms for communicating new ideas, and teamwork must be considered valuable and useful. In these universities, human resources, especially students, are considered the most valuable resource, and their risk-taking and innovation will be supported. The slogan of this university can be written as idealistic, futuristic, customer-oriented and innovative (Shah Hosseini, *Entrepreneurship in Action*, 2009: 91).

In general, the entrepreneurial university is a university that performs two tasks: First, it must educate future entrepreneurs, individual who can start new businesses, and it must also develop an entrepreneurial spirit in students in all areas.

Second, that it must act as an entrepreneur, organize business growth centers, create technology parks and the like, involve students in these organizations, and help students and graduates create businesses through them. It must also become financially independent.

### *Iraq And Objectives of Educating Entrepreneurship to Iraqi Students*

Iraq is a country in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. Its capital is Baghdad. Its neighboring countries are Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the south, Jordan and Syria in the west, Turkey in the north, and Iran in the east. In its southern part, Iraq has a small water border with the Persian Gulf, and the two famous rivers Tigris and Euphrates, which are the beginning of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, including Assyrians and Chaldeans throughout the ancient history of this region. These rivers enter Iraq from Turkey and flow to its south. Joining to the Karun River, they form the Arvand River and flow into the Persian Gulf. Iraq covers an area of 437,072 square kilometers (nearly a quarter of Iran). It is mostly lowland and tropical. Its west part is a desert and its east consists of fertile plains. However, part of Iraqi Kurdistan (northeast) is mountainous and cold. Iraq is also one of the largest countries with oil resources. It has 143 billion barrels of oil reserves. It has a population of about 40 million (Worldometers, 2020).

Many countries in the world are struggling with youth unemployment, and the number of unemployed youths in Iraq is also on the rise. The risk of unemployment is growing day by day and is affecting the government. The most prominent reason for this problem is the wars in this country, along with political instability and neglect of the agricultural, economic and tourist aspects. Oil exports have long played a major role in the Iraqi economy, accounting for 95% of its foreign revenues. Lack of development in other areas has led to 18 to 30 percent unemployment and a per capita income of \$ 4,000. Full-time employment in the public sector accounted for nearly 60% of total employment in 2011. The oil export sector has created very few jobs for Iraqi people. Currently, a low percentage of women (with the highest estimate being about 22% in 2011) are officially employed.

In 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority quickly issued binding orders regarding the privatization of the Iraqi economy and its opening to foreign investors. Citigroup put Iraq in the list of the G3 countries in February 2011; that is, countries that have the potential to grow the global economy in the future and can make good profits for foreign investors. The tourism industry in Iraq also plays a significant role in its economy because of some important Shiite religious sites. The Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization of Iran announced the statistics of Iranian tourists and pilgrims to Iraq in 2012 and pointed out that more than one million and two hundred thousand Iranians are annually sent to Iraq by land and air for a pilgrimage.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Ministry of Education included the Entrepreneurship Curriculum Program (ECP) in the vocabulary of the curriculum of vocational schools to help solve the problem of youths' increasing unemployment in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Approximately 1056 students will study the new curriculum in the academic year 2020-2021. As part of the program, UNIDO organized a 120-hour entrepreneurship development training for 15 teachers and staff at two secondary vocational schools in Duhok Province from September 20 to October 15, 2020 to prepare teachers to help students, pave the way for employment,

adapt their competencies to the needs of the labor market and promote the self-employment culture. The program included courses on topics such as entrepreneurship, business planning, leadership, and teaching methods.

## METHODOLOGY

Considering that the aim of the present study is to identify the factors affecting entrepreneurship education for Iraqi students with the aim of self-employment; Therefore, this research is applied research in terms of purpose, because its results can help policy makers, planners as well as all relevant people in the field of entrepreneurship education. This research has used content analysis and Delphi expert strategies based on the qualitative nature. Content analysis method was used to identify the factors affecting entrepreneurship education. The Delphi method of experts has been used with the aim of achieving group coherence and reinforcing the findings of content analysis, while avoiding the shortcomings of data collection and preventing the researcher's judgmental coding during content analysis. The Delphi method is a systematic process that uses data to predict and assist decision-making through survey rounds, and ultimately group consensus (Rahmani et al., 1999).

The statistical population studied in the present study is experts, staff and university professors with education related to entrepreneurship and job creation. Field method and in-depth and semi-structured interviews and Delphi questionnaire were used to collect data. The sampling method of this research is snowball, so several experts in the field of entrepreneurship and job creation were interviewed and this work continued until (20 interviews) that we achieved theoretical saturation.

## FINDINGS

The findings of content analysis and Delphi experts emerged in the form of 10 concepts and each concept is based on separate factors, based on which in the next section, its components and factors are fully examined.

The first factor is **the mental bedrock of stakeholders to improve EE with respect to self-employment**, they can be development of new ideas, project study and identification of strengths and weaknesses, technology skills, language skills, communication and coordination skills, report writing skills, planning skills, lack of opportunity, application of theoretical courses in a practical way, sustainable development and continuous change in it and improving financial income. By scrutinizing the components obtained from the first question, it can be considered that university students can start new activities by developing new ideas in new plans and methods in order to increase their skills in entrepreneurship and self-employment. These ideas require skills including technical, linguistic and communication skills. Planning and writing reports can also be helpful in improving students' skills. If the students' ideas are accompanied by the mentioned skills and are repeated consistently and continuously, they will definitely bring self-employment and financial income. Therefore, the findings of this question should be compared with other similar results in this regard.

Other findings from the interviews and the questionnaire can be **considered as having the perspective of teaching the skills needed for future jobs**. Therefore, to be self-employed in the future and enter the labor market, university students require skills which can have a significant effect on their self-employment. Factors obtained from the research and interviews conducted in this regard were taking high-level courses in technology, psychology, body language courses, intellectual skills, proper orientation given the possibility of employment, skill of controlling and paying attention to the details, the appropriate setting and modern educational tools, research methods and coping with problems and learning foreign languages. Learning and understanding these factors for students require very accurate and appropriate education and planning by universities and entrepreneurship development centers. Organizing entrepreneurship courses and workshops with the aim of self-employment can also make new entrepreneurs out of students. Emphasis on using business plan design techniques and starting a business in a real environment is also one of the factors that can be helpful to students' future employment.

Another component was **the government's support for educational centers**. It should be borne in mind that the full support of the government and other public and private institutions has a significant effect on students' growth and business creation since supporting them, whether financially or non-financially, will increase their motivation with the aim of self-employment after graduation. Other findings can be **used the capacity of teachers (professors) to train students**. These factors include academic education, lack of connection between information and modern tools, inefficiency of the educator, and practical education.

Other findings were **appropriate teaching methods for teaching students' skills**. These factors include educating the employment skills, introducing successful cases, investing on creative ideas, supporting the owners, relying on successful teaching methods, using successful and modern methods, e-learning, understanding the learning theories, complementing academic records and real experience, and methods of clarifying future expectations. EE enables the production of human, social and economic resources that makes it possible to meet the new needs of society. The results showed that economic structure, cultural structure, social structure, educational structure, external environment structure and individual characteristics are factors affecting the development of EE in public universities.

Another factor is the appropriate **content of textbooks related to future skills and entrepreneurial needs of students**. The factors obtained from the results of the interviews include the out-of-date curriculum, lack of content in textbooks, increasing the information in a productive way, and the poor content of the textbooks.

Other results can be seen in the **existence of facilities needed to teach skills to trainers**. These results indicate that most of the interviewers believed that the lack of facilities for EE will greatly affect the performance of educators. Other results indicated that due to the current situation in Iraq, there are few or no such facilities available to educators in different areas of this country. Therefore, it

can be acknowledged that the existence of the necessary facilities for entrepreneurship can have a significant effect on improving the skills of entrepreneurial educators.

Other results include **support for culture, community, university, school, and family from self-employment skills training**. Therefore, the factors derived from these interviews can be regarded as community, university, family and school.

Other results include **improved economic and technological infrastructure**. Therefore, the factors derived from this component include the effect of economy, the effect of infrastructure, the effect of society and the effect of culture. Given the growing role of universities in the development of societies, it is expected that universities, in addition to research and education, should take on other tasks as drivers of initiative and economic growth in each region. Moreover, governments try to achieve economic growth and meet the biggest economic challenges, i.e., improving the living standards, employment and increasing tax revenues. Entrepreneurship can be considered one of the main factors in creating economic value and an efficient tool for a country. It has become one of the largest and most basic academic activities in developing countries.

Another result obtained from the interviewees relates to the **role of the government in training the self-employment skills to students**. Factors derived from this component include developing education and efficiency centers, supporting the private sector, encouraging foreign companies, supporting the staff and dispatching them to developed countries, adding curricula to entrepreneurs, establishing employment and rehabilitation centers, and providing specialized institutions.

Another result is the **use of new educational strategies in successful countries to improve self-employment education**. The factors derived from these interviews include offering free courses, the need to persuade the youth group, developing practical courses, the connection of local entrepreneurs with global markets, paving the way for their growth and development, organizing educational courses for educators, development of the teaching method, entrepreneurship updates, supporting smart students, trying to prepare modern curricula, the need to use real ideas, and encouraging successful departments to adopt educational programs.

## CONCLUSION

Comparing the results with the findings of other studies, we can consider that most of the major socio-economic activities and skills affect the self-employment skills. Such results indicate people's behavior and way of thinking, along with environmental conditions and contexts, affect their decision to pursue an entrepreneurial activity. In addition, the stronger effect of economic motivation on predicting the entrepreneurial orientation of individuals was evaluated to be positive in this study, which has been ignored in previous studies. Considering the study sample, it can be said that economic motivation in postgraduate students can better guide the entrepreneurial orientation. Most

of the studies conducted in this area using the theory of planned behavior have reported the effect of attitudes toward entrepreneurship, mental norms and control of planned behavior on intention prediction. An attempt was made in this study to change these variables, derived from social psychology topics, to entrepreneurship indicators according to the statistical population under study, which is one of the strengths of the study. The study sample comprised entrepreneurship students, so it is suggested that other studies include other fields of study to increase the predictive validity of the research. In general, the findings of this study can help people start their own entrepreneurial and business process. It can be stated that enhancing entrepreneurial tendencies among students involves paying greater attention to effective factors such as social efficiency, economic motivation, individual and family utility, employer spirit and gaining social status.

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