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Original Article

The Best Curriculum Practices for Development of Employability Skills: Experience from Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Tanzania faces a significant challenge of skills mismatch, despite various initiatives to improve employability among graduates of various educational levels. Therefore, there was the need to analyse the best curriculum practices for improving employability skills among graduates of various education levels in Tanzania. The study analysed the best curriculum practices for improving the employability skills of graduates at various educational levels in Tanzania. The Framework for Employability formed the theoretical framework of the study. A mixed methods approach with a convergent design was used in the study where quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 243 respondents purposively and randomly selected. The data were statistically and thematically analysed. The study indicated that incorporating career development services, work-integrated learning, entrepreneurship education, technological pedagogy, and authentic assessment into the curriculum can significantly improve graduates' employability skills. It was also found that the practices offer practical experience, develop transferable skills, and enhance problem-solving skills. Technological pedagogy, entrepreneurial education, and authentic assessment are the best curriculum practices for improving graduates' employability. It was recommended that entrepreneurship education, technological pedagogy, and reflective assessment practices be actively promoted to enhance employability skills among graduates.

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INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is the foundation of education, serving as a guideline and roadmap for various levels of education (Bhargava, 2020; URT, 2015) for providing students with knowledge and skills for a better living. Curriculum can sometimes lack quality, relevance, and flexibility, necessitating additional strategies to enhance adaptability to labour market needs (Mgaiwa, 2021; OECD, 2020). In line with that, Tanzania has taken varying initiatives, including curriculum reform to leverage skills for employability (Paul & Tilya, 2014; URT, 2021). Also, the National Skills Development Programme was established as a framework for enhancing skills development for employability (URT, 2021; World Bank, 2016). Tanzania is still facing significant challenges regarding skills mismatch, as the disparity between the skills graduates acquired through education and those demanded in the labour market, despite efforts to develop relevant skills (URT, 2015, 2021). URT (2018) attributes that the existing skills mismatch is the result of curricula lacking industry linkages. Mgaiwa (2021) highlights that addressing skills mismatch requires effective practices in the curriculum. Bradley et al. (2021) advocate for effective practices in developing relevant skills for integration into education through curriculum reform. Also, UNESCO (2021) emphasized the necessity of integrating best practices in education to enhance employability skills. Therefore, this study analyzed the best curriculum practices for developing the employability skills of graduates at various education levels in Tanzania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The framework for Employability serves as the theoretical guide of the study**.** The framework was developed by Cole and Tibby in 2013 to offer practical guidance when integrating employability skills into the education system. The functionality of the framework involves four reflexive steps i.e. discussion, reflection, action, and evaluation. At the discussion, stakeholders review existing practices to identify areas for improvement. From reflection, strategies are developed based on the identified areas. The strategies are translated into actionable plans and then evaluated to assess their effectiveness and relevance in developing employability skills (Blackmore et al., 2016; Cole & Tibby, 2013). Even though the framework lacks a direct linkage between employability practices and curriculum reform, it offers a systematic approach to developing employability skills in educational practices and is adaptable to curriculum reform efforts, making it suitable for this study as its strengths surpass its weaknesses**.**

Empirical Review

Khampirat et al. (2019) found that work-integrated learning significantly develops confidence, initiative, motivation, and self-reflection which are important attributes for employability. Work-integrated learning offers students an understanding of workplace culture, meeting expectations, developing personal attributes, coping with changing work environment and developing career strategies (McLennan & Keating 2008; Orrell 2004; Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010). The report of UNICEF in 2019 ranked career development learning as a crucial subject area for developing transferable skills. Also, the study by Ho et al. (2022) found career development learning effective in helping students identify clear career paths, understand work requirements, and meet necessary qualifications. According to Munishi (2022), the absence of guidance and counselling services in higher education significantly contributes to the shortage of soft skills among graduates.

The study by Oluseye et al. (2017) found positive effects of entrepreneurship education on self-employment initiatives among Nigerian science and technology students. Also, the study by Prabhat and Simi (2021) reported positive effects of entrepreneurship skills on employability. For Illingworth (2023), entrepreneurship skills may significantly improve learning experiences if integrated as a core subject matter of the curriculum. Similarly, Ouragin and Lakhal (2023) favour the interdisciplinary model of integrating entrepreneurship skills into the curriculum, integrating it into various disciplines. Further, entrepreneurship skills are included in the European key competency Farmwork as among eight crucial skills for employability (European Commission,

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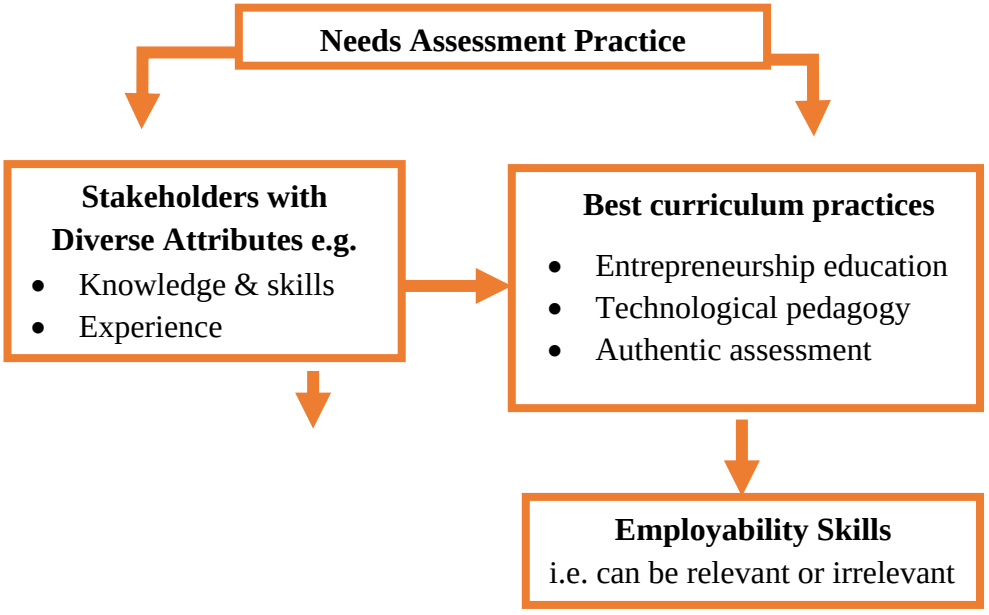
2019). Entrepreneurship education in the curriculum can lead to self-employment. Technology pedagogy has increasingly been recognized as a strategy for developing 21st-century skills through teaching and learning. Technological pedagogy has a positive impact on developing 21st century skills (Samaila & Molwele, 2022). Technological use has innovatively promoted student-centred learning (Walker et al., 2017; Ra et al., 2019). Learning technologies transforming traditional classroom instruction into collaborative learning (Ra et al., 2019). Fau and Moreau (2018) found that the integration of technological pedagogy in education significantly enhances the employability of youth. The competency framework has ranked digital literacy among the top eight skills for employability (European Commission, 2019). Digital literacy has positive effects on perceived employability skills (Kee et al, 2023).

Assessment has been viewed as important in influencing soft skills for graduates at different levels of education (Reimers, 2020; Munishi, 2022). Practical-based assessment according to Oman et al. (2022) makes students comprehend real-life issues as well as develop problem-solving skills. Sanga (2019) and Wolf (1995) maintain that traditional paper-based assessments are insufficient for assessing competence, and soft skills in classroom assessments. Miller and Konstantinou (2022) suggested reflective assessment as effective in developing employability skills through work-based assessment. Reflective assessment allows students to connect scientific understanding to real-life problems and skill development (Mello et al., 2021). However, literature reviews surveyed did not comprehensively reveal how effectively to integrate the practices into Tanzanian education curricula, despite providing insights on their impact on skill development.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Process of Integrating Best Curriculum Practices for Employability



The conceptual framework in Fig.1 indicates the process of integrating best curriculum practices in education to enhance employability skills among graduates. The needs assessment process identifies areas of weakness in education compared to the labour market demands. The results from the needs assessment inform on the need for curriculum practices effective for addressing the challenges in education hindering employability. Stakeholders with diverse knowledge, skills and experiences are collaborating in suggesting and adapting practices best in skills development. The practices may avail to aspects such as content, pedagogy, and assessments. The adapted practices permit the

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curriculum to provides graduates with quality and relevant skills essential for employability, as depicted in Figure 1. Generally, the best practices for developing employability skills are determined through needs assessment, enriched with inputs from stakeholders by aligning them to the needs of the labour market.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed-methods approach with a convergent design, involving 243 participants from a 658-target population, including university academics, tutors, curriculum developers, analysts, advocates, and employers under ATE. The study utilized Cochran's adjusted formula to sample 231 participants from a target population, with 12 respondents participating in interviews obtained through saturation. A total of 231 participants including university academics, teachers, tutors, and curriculum developers, were randomly selected, with 12 participants chosen purposively from faculty deans, curriculum directors, NGOs executive officers, and senior researchers. The study utilized a self-developed 5-Likert scale questionnaire, which was tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.807$). Research clearance and permits were obtained adhering to ethical considerations and research logistical procedures. The data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used for quantitative data analysis. The quantitative data analysis confined to mean scores, standard deviations and multiple linear regression. The descriptive statistics summarized respondents' agreement with perceived curriculum practices on employability skills, while multiple regression examined the statistical effects of these practices on skill development. The qualitative data collected through interviews was analyzed thematically and presented as narratives and verbatim. The study was thoroughly examined by comparing and merging both quantitative and qualitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study analyzed the best curriculum practices in developing employability skills among graduates. The data from questionnaires were firstly analysed descriptively using mean scores and standard deviations and presented in descriptive table. Table 4.1 presents the descriptive summary on the best practices for developing employability skills from 8 Likert scale statements which ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree as follow:

Table 1.: Best Curriculum Practices that Improve Employability Skills

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career development learning focus on building transferable skills suitable for a wide range of career paths.	231	4.1039	.85848
Career development learning provide students with information about various jobs so as to make informed decisions about their future career.	231	4.1558	.85055
Work integrated learning offers opportunity for mentorship from experienced professionals into their chosen fields.	231	4.2554	.80198
Work integrated learning helps to bridge the gap between academic learning and work practical application.	231	4.2165	.88263
Entrepreneurship education equips students with the necessary skills to flourish in a dynamic and competitive business environment.	231	4.2078	.98693
Entrepreneurship education fosters innovation and job creation skills.	231	4.4935	2.73920
Technological pedagogy facilitates easy development of 21st Century skills.	231	4.2251	.84518
Technological pedagogy facilitates the development of digital skills and ultimately enhances employability	231	4.1948	.90466

Source: Field Data (2024)

The data in Table 1 shows that respondents generally agree on career development learning, work-integrated learning, entrepreneurship education, and technological pedagogy as best curriculum practices for improving employability skills. These practices

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can be adapted in curricula to enhance employability skills of graduates at various education levels.

Accordingly, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of various best curriculum practices on graduates' employability skills development, using a standard error tolerance of 5% as recommended by Cohen et al. (2018) a conventional measure. The results are presented in Table 2 and 3 respectively as follows:

Table 2: Effects of Best Curriculum Practices to Enhance Employability Skills

Model Summary[b]			
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**
1	.754[a]	.568	.559

a. Predictors: (Constant), Technological pedagogy, Career development learning, Entrepreneurship education, Work-integrated learning
b. Dependent Variable: Employability skills

The (R^2) shows how career development learning, work-integrated learning, entrepreneurship education, and technological pedagogy, as best curriculum practices, share effects on developing employability skills. The (R^2=0.568) indicates that career development learning, work-integrated learning, entrepreneurship education and technological pedagogy practices collectively contribute to 56.8% of the development of employability skills. The value in the model (R^2=0.568) indicates a larger effect size (0.568>0.26). This implies that the integration of these practices in curricula significantly affects the development of employability skills among graduates at various educational levels. Further, it implies that regular evaluation of curricula is crucial to determine if practices are still relevant or require modification, indicating the need for curriculum reform either entirely or incrementally.

Table 3: Best Curriculum Practices to Enhance Employability Skills

Coefficients			
	Unstandardized Coefficients	**Standardized Coefficients**	
Model	**B**	**Beta**	**Sig.**
1 (Constant)	.000		.999
Career development learning	.162	.196	.008
Work-integrated learning	.110	.147	.047
Entrepreneurship education	.355	.444	.000
Technological pedagogy	.376	.298	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employability skills

Table 3 reveals a significant positive relationship between employability skills development and career development learning, work-integrated learning, entrepreneurship education, and technological pedagogy curriculum practices (β=0.196, p=0.008; C=0.147, p=0.047; β=0.444, p=0.000; β=0.298, p=0.000), respectively. In relation to the relative strength of one practice over other practices on developing employability skills, it appears that entrepreneurship education exerts the strongest influence (β=0.444), followed by technological pedagogy (β=0.298), then career development learning (β=0.196), and lastly the work-integrated learning (0.147). The results imply that entrepreneurship education is the curriculum practice that has the strongest influence while work-integrated learning has the least influence on developing employability skills. Entrepreneurship education significantly impacts the development of employability skills, which is in line with the research of Prabhat and Simi (2021) which found that entrepreneurship skills significantly enhance students' employability. Also, the European Key Competency Framework regarded entrepreneurship skills has significant positive effects on employability skills (European Commission, 2019). Similarly, the impact of technological pedagogy on the development of employability is supported by

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the findings from the study of Kee et al. (2023) that digital literacy significantly enhances perceived employability and transferable skills. Equally, the European key competence framework indicates that technological pedagogy positively impacts employability skills development (European Commission, 2019). Moreover, the role of career development learning in developing employability skills has been supported in the study of Khampirat et al. (2019), which indicates that work-integrated learning significantly enhances student work skills performance.

The qualitative data from interviews on best curriculum practices for developing employability skills among graduates at different educational level was analyzed thematically, as shown in Table 4, and presented as narratives and verbatim, providing valuable insights into the quantitative data.

Table 4: Qualitative Data Analysis for Best Curriculum Practice

Category	Theme	Description
Curriculum practices	Career development learning	• Graduates often lack sufficient career information upon graduation due to the absence of career education as part of general education • Career-related information prevents graduates from making wrong career choices
	Work-integrated learning	• Effectively links classroom academic learning with practical application • Field attachments such as internships should be included in the curriculum
	Entrepreneurship education	• Enhances self-employment skills • Incorporate entrepreneurship into all courses
	Technological pedagogy	• Technological pedagogy has become an unavoidable global trend in the modern context of rapid change to foster digital skills • Technological pedagogy should be at the centre of educational institutions
	Authentic assessment	• Assessing the practical application of academic knowledge • Assessment by nature should not rely on paper-and-pencil tests but rather on methods based on actual experience • Reflective assessment method is effective in assessing skill-based education learning outcomes

Source: Field data (2024)

Career Development Learning

Data from Table 4 revealed that most graduates incorporating career education into the curriculum aids students in developing skills suitable for various career paths, thereby preparing them for their future career choices. Career information aids students in making informed decisions about their future careers by providing them with knowledge about the characteristics and fundamental requirements of different jobs. The study aligns with the UNICEF report in 2019 ranking career development learning as a crucial subject for developing transferable skills. Ho et al. (2022) indicate career development learning helps students develop clear career paths, understand work requirements, and meet necessary qualifications.

Also, data reveals that graduates often lack sufficient career information upon graduation due to the absence of career education as part of general education. One of the respondents explained that career information is crucial for enhancing employability skills, as it allows students to explore diverse options based on their interests and aspirations. Another respondent insisted that the curriculum should incorporate career education to provide students with essential job market information, preventing them from making wrong career choices. Mushi (2023) argues that the lack of

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guidance and counselling in higher learning institutions is a significant factor contributing to the shortage of soft skills among graduates. The National Employment Policy (2008) reveals that vocational guidance and counselling constitute inputs for improving youth employment. The National Skills Development Strategy 2016–2027 promotes career development learning as an intervention to improve youth skills and facilitate their transition to the workforce. Early access to career information in education helps students choose subjects that align with their career goals, addressing the challenge of graduates lacking crucial career information.

Work-integrated Learning

Data from Table 4, indicates that work-integrated learning effectively links classroom academic learning with practical application. Work-integrated learning effectively integrates classroom academics with practical work, thereby enhancing the development of employability skills. Work-integrated learning entails essential aspects for graduates' future performance and sustainability in the labour market, including the nature of the work environment. The findings of the study corroborate some previous studies suggesting that work-integrated learning aids students in understanding workplace culture, meeting expectations, developing personal attributes, coping with changing work environments and developing career strategies (Cooper et al., 2010; McLennan & Keating 2008; Orrell 2004).

The findings further revealed that to effectively improve employability skills among graduates, field attachments such as internships should be made a common practice of education particularly, at training levels. One participant stated that

> *In order to help students graduate with the practical skills needed in the job market, I believe field attachment such as internships or field training should be included in the curriculum to equip students with practical skills and experiences for the job market.*

The education system should incorporate work-related practices to improve learning methods, expose students to working environments, and boost confidence in preparing for future occupations. The finding aligns with the study by Khampirat et al. (2019), which found that work-integrated learning fosters students' confidence, work skills, initiative, motivation, and self-reflection. The National Five-Year Development Plan 2021/22–2025/26 and the National Skill Development Strategy 2016–2027 prioritize workplace practices like internships as key tools for skill development.

Entrepreneurship Education

Table 4 shows that entrepreneurship education equips students with the necessary skills to excel in a competitive business environment by promoting self-employability mindsets. Entrepreneurship education enhances individuals' entrepreneurial skills and innovation, enabling them to pursue self-employment, thereby increasing their chances of success. The finding underscores the importance of entrepreneurship education in equipping individuals with the skills to innovate and create employment opportunities. The finding corroborates the study by Illingworth (2023), which indicates that entrepreneurship education shapes students' mindsets by promoting creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills. Also, the finding corroborates the study of Oluseye et al. (2017), which found that entrepreneurship education positively affects self-employment initiatives among graduates.

Further, results reveal that incorporating entrepreneurship education in the core curriculum significantly improves students' employability skills. Most respondents support integrating entrepreneurial education and skills into the main curriculum, rather than as an extracurricular. Integrating entrepreneurship education in all course or subjects at all levels can enhance the use of entrepreneurial skills from diverse fields, increasing the chance of excelling in the labour market. One participant observed the following.

> *Incorporate entrepreneurship into all courses, even if it is literature or history, to equip students with skills from various disciplines, enabling them to independently manage their lives by applying interdisciplinary entrepreneurial skills to explore various opportunities.*

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Another participant made the following statement*:*

> *I suggest incorporating entrepreneurship skills into all subjects in order for students to see opportunities and potentials within their field of specialization. Students should identify potentials in their specializations to capitalize on opportunities by commercializing activities and services in their chosen field of study.*

Entrepreneurship can significantly benefit students by integrating it into all subjects or courses, allowing them to transform their fields into commercial ventures, countering the stereotype of entrepreneurship limited to small businesses. The findings are consistent with previous research by Illingworth (2023) who also suggested incorporating entrepreneurship skills into the curriculum as core subject matter. Ouragin and Lakhal (2023) support the study findings for an interdisciplinary model to integrate entrepreneurship skills into education, incorporating skills from various disciplines.

Technological Pedagogy

The data in Table 4 revealed that technological pedagogy has become an unavoidable global trend in modern context of rapid change. This kind of teaching places a strong emphasis on using technology to foster digital abilities, which are currently essential for job prospects. Technological pedagogy makes the adoption of 21st century skills and digital literacy easier, especially in the era of globalization, where digital literacy is a crucial job market success. The study suggests that incorporating technological pedagogy into education is a straightforward approach to developing employability skills. The finding aligns with the study by Samaila and Molwele (2022) that technology integration positively enhances the development of 21st century skills. Technology in education has facilitated pedagogical innovation, allowing student-centred learning activities to thrive (Walker, Jenkins & Voce, 2017).

Further, the study reveals that technological pedagogy should be at the centre of educational institutions to completely incorporate the worldwide trend of broadening the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Technological pedagogy integrates digital tools, online platforms, and blended learning methodologies into education, preparing students for professional settings and modern workforce demands. The study corroborates previous research indicating that learning technologies are transforming traditional classroom training by promoting collaborative learning (Ra et al., 2019). Technological pedagogy is a global trend that emphasizes the integration of digital skills in education, which is crucial for enhancing employment opportunities. The study by Fau and Moreau (2018) supports the notion that incorporating technological pedagogy in education can enhance youth employability.

Authentic Assessment

The findings of the study reveal that authentic assessment is crucial for assessing the practical application of academic knowledge. Assessment is vital for identifying strengths and weaknesses, and providing a comprehensive understanding of employability skills. The study aligns with the Framework for Employability, emphasizing the significance of assessing techniques for their relevance and effectiveness in enhancing employability (Blackmore et al., 2016; Cole & Tibby, 2013). Reimers (2020) and Munishi (2022) emphasize the importance of assessment in enhancing teachers' training curricula to incorporate soft-skill teaching. Authentic assessment enables educators to assess students' practical application of learning, providing valuable insights into their workforce readiness. One of the participants stated that:

> *Students can be properly assessed for their problem-solving, communication, cooperation, and adaptability skills by providing them with activities that are similar to real-world situations. assessment is crucial for assessing students' skill development, ensuring they have acquired relevant skills and can effectively apply them in real-life situations.*

The study findings imply that the effectiveness of employability skill development is complemented by the process of authentic assessments, which is helpful in monitoring the progress and status of the acquired skills and if the students are ready to apply the acquired skills. Accordingly, the study revealed that employability skills assessment should use real-

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life experiences, with reflective assessment methods being effective in evaluating learning outcomes, particularly in showcasing initiative, creativity, and critical thinking. One participant provided a commentary in line with the reflective assessment, stating:

> *I advise using the reflective assessment technique. For instance, when teaching history, I might assign students to survey the Tabora municipality to identify resources that are being misused and to learn how to use them properly. This would allow students to gain real-world experience while learning about the proper use of resources. In order to help them create jobs for themselves and others, as well as to keep the town clean, I can also assign them the responsibility of considering the idea of starting a factory based on the cabbages in the town.*

The finding implies that reflective assessment promotes critical thinking and creativity, crucial for employability, by comparing classroom learning to real-life situations, thus significantly improving graduates' employability skills. The finding is consistent with Miller and Konstantinou (2022) who emphasized the effectiveness of reflective assessment in enhancing employability skills through work-based assessment. Mello et al. (2021) found that a reflective approach enhances students' skill awareness, allowing them to connect scientific understanding to real-world problems and skill development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study suggests that integrating career development, work-integrated learning, entrepreneurship education, technological pedagogy, and authentic assessment into curriculums can significantly improve graduates' employability and problem-solving abilities. The study reveals that technological pedagogy, entrepreneurial education, and authentic assessment are the most effective curriculum practices for enhancing employability skills among graduates. The study suggests incorporating technological pedagogy into curricula to enhance digital literacy skills and design relevant courses for teacher training in entrepreneurship for long-term employability development. Higher and basic education should adopt a reflective assessment approach to evaluate outcomes, fostering initiative, creativity, and critical thinking through agencies and training institutions.

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