

Employability Skills and Employment Outcomes Level of Graduates in Selected Universities in South-West, Nigeria: The Moderating Effect of Career Coaching

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Abstract

Employment outcomes are essential indicators of how effectively higher education prepares students for the labor market, impacting both individuals' financial security and broader economic stability. In response to concerns about employment outcomes among graduates, universities have implemented various initiatives aimed at enhancing employment outcomes. However, these initiatives have often fallen short of expectations, evidenced by declining employment outcomes. This suggests that the initiatives may not be addressing the issue of employment outcomes, which could be linked to deficiencies in employability skills. This underscores the need to examine how employability skills influence employment outcomes, focusing on graduates from selected universities in Ogun State Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. The population of this study comprised 51,410 graduates of six selected universities in Ogun State Nigeria. Sample size of 497 was determined using the Research Advisor's sample size table. The study adopted simple random sampling technique. A structured and validated questionnaire was used for data collection. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged from 0.73 to 0.84. A response rate of 93.2% was recorded. Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential (multiple linear and hierarchical regression) statistics at 5% level of significance. The findings revealed that employability skills had effect on employment outcomes of graduates of selected universities in Ogun State, Nigeria when moderated by career coaching ($\beta = -.02$, $t = -2.09$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.05$, $\Delta F = 4.38$, $p < 0.05$). The findings revealed that employability skills influenced employment outcomes of graduates of selected universities in Ogun State, Nigeria when moderated by career coaching. The study recommended educational institutions should prioritize integrating employability skills into their curricula to enhance employment outcomes.

Keywords: Adaptability skills, Career coaching, Employment outcomes, Employability skills, Job quality, Problem solving skills

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Introduction

Graduates' employment outcomes remain a critical measure of education effectiveness worldwide. Globally, employment outcomes have become increasingly volatile due to rapid technological change, economic disruptions, and evolving employer demands. For instance, the World Economic Forum (2025) projects that 39% of core skills required in jobs will change by 2030, emphasizing adaptability, digital literacy, and soft skills for ongoing employability. The World Bank (2025) highlights that skill gaps are among the most significant barriers to employment, with millions of young adults unable to secure sustainable jobs despite educational qualifications. Studies also show increasing importance of soft skills such as resilience, leadership, and problem-solving in employment outcomes across diverse economies (Smith et al., 2023; Kumar & Lee, 2024). This global scenario underscores the essential link between the development of employability skills and successful employment transitions among graduates.

In the United States, employment outcomes for graduates are influenced heavily by the acquisition of both technical and non-technical skills. Research indicates that traditional academic credentials alone are insufficient to guarantee job placement without accompanying employability skills like communication, teamwork, and critical thinking (Brown & Wilson, 2023; Lopez et al., 2022). Recent labor market analyses in the U.S. reveal that youth programs which integrate skills training and career readiness demonstrate a positive impact on employment success (Johnson et al., 2021; Martinez & White, 2023). Additionally, support structures such as career coaching have been identified as key moderators enhancing the relationship between skill acquisition and employment outcomes by improving graduates' career adaptability and readiness (Nguyen & Parker, 2024). These findings illustrate how a multi-faceted approach combining skills development and career guidance substantially benefits employment prospects in the American context.

European countries exhibit consistent trends in the shift from higher education to employment, focusing on the importance of relevant skills and career support. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop, 2023) reports that employers consistently prioritize soft skills such as teamwork, sector-specific expertise, and digital literacy. The European Union's drive for higher employment rates among young graduates places considerable emphasis on employability skills integrated into academic curricula (Franzen & Müller, 2023; Rossi et al., 2024). Career coaching programs have gained prominence in Europe as interventions that help students navigate labor market complexities by fostering career clarity and adaptability, which significantly improves employment outcomes (Peterson, 2022; Andersson & Jansson, 2024). These developments underline the essential role of career coaching in complementing employability skills for graduate success in Europe.

African graduates face employment challenges due to a significant gap between their skills and the demands of the labor market. The African Development Bank (2024) estimates that annually only a fraction of university graduates find jobs reflecting their qualifications, owing to inadequate practical and digital skills. African graduates often lack competencies essential for modern workplaces such as critical thinking, technology use, and leadership, contributing to high youth unemployment rates (Banga, 2023; Okoro & Mbaye, 2024). Career coaching and mentorship programs have recently emerged as critical support mechanisms in African higher education, aimed at bridging the gap between graduates' skill sets and employer expectations (Eyecity Africa, 2024; Tadesse & Osei, 2023). These initiatives are instrumental in enhancing graduates'

preparedness for the dynamic job market and improving employment outcomes across various African contexts.

In Nigeria, the scenario is characterized by significant employability challenges despite rising educational attainments. Reports indicate that over 53% of Nigerian youths are unemployed, with graduates struggling significantly due to the lack of essential employability skills such as digital literacy, problem-solving, and communication (VeriVAfrica, 2024; National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The Nigerian education system has been criticized for its outdated curriculum, which inadequately prepares graduates for the modern workforce (Ojo & Adebawale, 2023; Ayodele & Musa, 2024). Furthermore, the discrepancy between graduates' qualifications and labor market needs exacerbates unemployment and underemployment issues. Consequently, career coaching interventions that provide personalized guidance and skill application support have gained attention as crucial moderators that could enhance employment outcomes by equipping graduates to better navigate job market demands (Adebayo & Tijani, 2023; Adefemi et al., 2025).

Overall, career coaching acts as a significant moderator in the employability skills-employment outcomes nexus. Studies globally and within Africa show that career coaching facilitates the development of career adaptability, self-efficacy, and proactive job search behavior among graduates, thereby enhancing their employment outcomes (Wang et al., 2023; Kim & Park, 2024; Adeyemi & Olaniyan, 2025). By contextualizing skills development and aligning graduates' aspirations with labor market realities, career coaching improves not only employment rates but also the quality of jobs obtained. This study, therefore, intends to explore the moderating effect of career coaching on the relationship between employability skills and employment outcomes among graduates of selected universities in South-West Nigeria.

Several scholars have explored the relationship between employability skills and employment outcomes across various contexts (Abdullah et al., 2021; Ann-Calumpiano, 2023; Farich & Kustono, 2022; Hiscox et al., 2022; Khurana & Misra, 2021; Tiwari & Malati, 2020). However, the impact of specific employability skills on the employment outcomes of Nigerian graduates remains inadequately addressed; this has led to a significant research gap that warrants further investigation by a study of this nature (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021; Bello et al., 2021). Insufficient focus on critical skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and technical skills has emerged as a significant barrier to enhancing graduates' employability within Nigeria's competitive job market (Ajadi, 2023). This inadequacy is evident in the high unemployment rates among graduates, alongside a substantial proportion facing underemployment or engaging in informal work (Abdu-Raheem, 2022). The lack of essential employability skills has led to diminished job readiness, decreased satisfaction with employment opportunities, and increased attrition rates among new hires, ultimately hampering their career progression and income potential (Pitan & Muller, 2023). Consequently, companies often report challenges in finding graduates who can effectively contribute to workplace goals, resulting in operational inefficiencies, reduced innovation, and an overall decline in performance (Medase & Wyrwich, 2022). Moreover, these skills gap adversely affects customer service quality, leading to decreased customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are vital for companies aiming to maintain a competitive edge in Nigeria's dynamic economy (Lawal et al., 2022). Therefore, addressing the deficiencies in employability skills among Nigerian graduates is crucial for improving their employment outcomes and fostering sustainable economic growth in the country (Ajayi et al., 2022; Edafe et al., 2023; Osabohien et al., 2022).

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Employment Outcomes

According to Fieger et al. (2024), employment outcomes are defined as the measurable results of individuals' participation in the labor market, reflecting their success in securing, retaining, and advancing in employment. These outcomes include indicators such as job placement rates, employment duration, earnings levels, career progression, and job satisfaction. Ikutegbe et al. (2024) submitted that they are often used to evaluate the effectiveness of educational institutions, training programs, and workforce initiatives in preparing individuals for meaningful and sustainable employment. Additionally, Liu (2024) stated that employment outcomes provide insights for policymakers and organizations to assess labor market trends, address skill gaps, and implement strategies that enhance economic and workforce development. Also, employment outcomes refer to the measurable results of an individual's employment status, such as job acquisition, job retention, career advancement, and overall job satisfaction. These outcomes have numerous advantages, both for individuals and society (Elstad & Heggeb, 2021). For individuals, positive employment outcomes lead to financial stability, enabling them to meet their basic needs, invest in personal growth, and secure a higher quality of life.

Employment fosters a sense of purpose, enhances self-esteem, and provides opportunities for skill development and career progression (Wong et al., 2021). Moreover, stable employment outcomes contribute to mental and emotional well-being, reducing the stress associated with unemployment or job insecurity. On a broader scale, Haile (2023) stated that positive employment outcomes benefit society by bolstering economic growth through increased consumer spending and tax revenues. They also alleviate social burdens by reducing reliance on public assistance programs and decreasing the incidence of poverty-related issues. Additionally, higher employment rates foster social cohesion and community engagement, as employed individuals are more likely to participate in civic activities and contribute to societal progress (Thoresen et al., 2021). Given the discussion above, the researcher defined employment outcomes as the measurable results or impacts of employment-related activities, typically assessed for individuals, organizations, or populations. These outcomes encompass a variety of indicators, such as job placement rates, job retention, earnings growth, career advancement, and job satisfaction.

2.1.2 Employability Skills

Hains-Wesson and Ji (2020) defined employability skills as the essential skills and personal attributes that individuals need to succeed in the workplace. These skills go beyond technical expertise and include qualities such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and time management (Kamaroellah et al., 2021). According to Bhatti et al. (2022), employability skills are crucial for ensuring individuals can meet the demands of their roles, collaborate effectively with others, and demonstrate reliability and initiative in the workplace. Employability skills are defined as a set of core competencies and personal attributes that enable an individual to effectively contribute to the workplace, succeed in a job, and advance in their career (Soundararajan et al., 2020). These skills typically include communication, problem-solving, teamwork, time management, adaptability, and leadership. Additionally, a strong work ethic, critical thinking, and the ability to work under pressure are also essential components (Dewanto & Pritasari, 2023). Employability skills are the key abilities and attributes that individuals need to be successful in the workplace. These skills go beyond academic qualifications and technical

knowledge, focusing on personal qualities, attitudes, and behaviors that enhance an individual's ability to work effectively in a professional environment (Suarta et al., 2024). Communication skills, both verbal and written, are essential for conveying ideas clearly and collaborating with others. Problem-solving abilities and critical thinking are also crucial, allowing employees to tackle challenges and innovate (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). Time management and organizational skills ensure that tasks are completed efficiently, and deadlines are met. Teamwork and interpersonal skills foster positive relationships with colleagues, contributing to a harmonious work environment (Mello et al., 2021).

Employability skills are essential attributes that enhance an individual's ability to successfully enter, remain, and progress in the workforce. These skills go beyond technical expertise and academic qualifications, encompassing a broad range of competencies that make employees valuable and adaptable in various work environments (McHenry & Krishnan, 2022). Among the primary advantages of employability skills is their role in boosting career opportunities. Employers seek individuals who can demonstrate not only specialized knowledge but also strong communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and time-management skills (Karimah & Kriswanto, 2023). These attributes often make a candidate stand out in a competitive job market. Moreover, employability skills contribute to job stability and growth. Employees who possess these skills are more likely to perform consistently, collaborate effectively with others, and adapt to new challenges, which can lead to job retention and advancement (Othman et al., 2022). Given the review, the researcher defined employability skills as the combination of technical abilities, personal attributes, and interpersonal skills that individuals need to secure, retain, and excel in employment. These skills include effective communication, problem-solving, teamwork, time management, and adaptability. In addition to job-specific knowledge, employability skills enable individuals to work well with others, demonstrate initiative, and navigate challenges in a professional setting. Possessing these skills enhances an individual's value to employers and helps them thrive in a competitive job market, fostering long-term career success.

2.1.2.1 Communication Skills

According to Amalina and Vidákovich (2023), in both personal and professional settings, effective communication fosters stronger relationships, enhances collaboration, and minimizes misunderstandings. Communication skills are defined as the ability to effectively exchange information, thoughts, and ideas through various channels such as speaking, writing, and non-verbal cues (Li et al., 2022). These skills encompass both the ability to express oneself clearly and the ability to actively listen and understand others (Tompkins et al., 2022). Communication skills are characterized by the ability to effectively convey, receive, and interpret information through verbal, non-verbal, and written channels (Szwajca, 2022). According to Mtega (2021), strong communication skills encompass active listening, clarity of speech, and the ability to tailor messages to different audiences. Verbal communication involves not only speaking clearly but also adjusting tone, volume, and pace to ensure understanding. Non-verbal communication, including body language, facial expressions, and eye contact, plays a critical role in reinforcing or contradicting verbal messages (Erjavec et al., 2021).

Communication skills are essential in both personal and professional settings, as they foster understanding, collaboration, and conflict resolution (Karsaev, 2020). Schär et al. (2022) argued that a person with strong communication skills can effectively express thoughts, ideas, and emotions, making it easier to build relationships, both in the workplace and in social interactions.

These skills are particularly important in leadership roles, where clear communication is key to guiding teams, delegating tasks, and ensuring that everyone is aligned with the organization's goals (Jucha et al., 2020). Additionally, communication skills enable individuals to listen actively, which enhances empathy and understanding. This creates a supportive environment where people feel valued and heard, which can improve morale and productivity. Furthermore, Prokofiev et al. (2021) postulated that effective communicators are better at persuading others, making their arguments more compelling and their decision-making processes more efficient. Strong communication also plays a critical role in conflict resolution, as it allows individuals to express differing viewpoints calmly and constructively, minimizing misunderstandings and fostering mutual respect. As claimed by Nasaruddin et al. (2023), in the digital age, communication skills have expanded beyond face-to-face interactions, encompassing written communication, presentations, and virtual meetings, making them even more crucial in maintaining professional relationships. Whether conveying a message in person or online, the ability to articulate ideas clearly and respectfully ensures that interactions are productive and positive. Ultimately, communication skills not only contribute to personal growth but also enhance overall effectiveness in the workplace, promoting cooperation, understanding, and success (Suh, 2022; Tang et al., 2021). From the review of extant literature, communication skills are defined as the ability to effectively convey and receive messages through speaking, writing, listening, and non-verbal means. These skills involve the clear expression of ideas, the ability to listen attentively, and the capacity to interpret and respond to others' messages appropriately. Effective communication requires not only articulating thoughts clearly but also adapting one's communication style to suit different contexts and audiences. Strong communication skills are essential for fostering understanding, building relationships, and facilitating collaboration in both personal and professional settings.

2.1.2.2 Problem-Solving Skills

According to Haenilah et al. (2021), problem-solving skills are defined as the ability to identify, analyze, and find solutions to complex or challenging situations. These skills involve critical thinking, creativity, resourcefulness, and the ability to break down problems into manageable steps. Akben (2020) corroborated Haenilah et al. (2021) by indicating that effective problem solvers are able to evaluate various options, anticipate potential outcomes, and make decisions that best address the problem at hand. Problem-solving skills are characterized by the ability to analyze situations, identify issues, and come up with effective solutions. These skills involve critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability, as well as the capacity to evaluate different perspectives and approaches (Iswinarti & Suminar, 2019). An individual with strong problem-solving skills can break down complex problems into smaller, more manageable parts, and systematically explore various possible solutions (Schöbel et al., 2023). Additionally, they can assess risks and consequences, choosing the best course of action based on the available information. The process typically includes gathering relevant data, brainstorming ideas, testing solutions, and refining approaches based on results (Erol & Çırak, 2022).

Problem-solving skills are essential in both personal and professional life, offering numerous advantages that enhance an individual's ability to navigate challenges effectively. One key benefit is that strong problem-solving abilities lead to increased adaptability (Gunawan et al., 2020). When faced with unexpected obstacles or changes, individuals with good problem-solving skills can quickly assess the situation, identify key issues, and develop effective solutions without feeling

overwhelmed. This adaptability is particularly valuable in fast-paced environments, where innovation and the ability to adjust to new circumstances are crucial for success (Faulkner et al., 2023). Additionally, problem-solving skills foster creativity. By considering different approaches to a problem, individuals are more likely to come up with unique and inventive solutions that others may overlook. This creativity not only improves the ability to resolve current issues but also contributes to continuous improvement and forward-thinking in various areas of life (Afacan & Kaya, 2022). From the reviewed literature, the researcher defined problem-solving skills as the ability to think critically and creatively to identify, analyze, and resolve problems effectively. These skills involve breaking down complex issues into smaller, manageable parts, evaluating potential solutions, and making informed decisions. Strong problem-solving requires a combination of logical thinking, adaptability, and the ability to collaborate with others when necessary. It also involves anticipating challenges, finding innovative approaches, and being persistent in overcoming obstacles. Problem-solving is a crucial skill in both personal and professional contexts, enabling individuals to address difficulties and achieve successful outcomes.

2.1.2.3 Teamwork Skills

Ma and Leman (2023) stated that teamwork skills are defined as the abilities that enable individuals to effectively collaborate with others in a group setting to achieve common goals. These skills involve communication, active listening, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and the ability to contribute to and support group efforts (Normandin et al., 2023). Similarly, Park et al. (2022) submitted that teamwork requires individuals to respect diverse perspectives, work towards a shared objective, and adapt to various roles within the team. In opinion of Guaman-Quintanilla et al. (2022), effective teamwork promotes cooperation, enhances productivity, and fosters a positive and inclusive environment, making it a key asset in both personal and professional settings. Teamwork skills are characterized by a variety of abilities that enable individuals to collaborate effectively in a group setting. These skills include strong communication, which allows team members to share ideas, listen to one another, and ensure that everyone is on the same page (Guo et al., 2022; Orfánusová et al., 2023). As indicated by Alegret et al. (2023), active listening is key to understanding others' perspectives and responding thoughtfully, fostering an environment of mutual respect. Collaboration and cooperation are also crucial, as team members must work together toward a common goal, contributing their unique strengths and talents (Gettel et al., 2023).

Teamwork skills are essential in both personal and professional settings, offering a multitude of advantages that foster success, growth, and innovation. One of the primary benefits of teamwork is the ability to combine diverse skills, perspectives, and expertise (Beiboer et al., 2023). When individuals collaborate, they bring unique strengths to the table, allowing for more creative and effective solutions to problems. This diversity often leads to better decision-making as team members challenge each other's assumptions and contribute fresh ideas, ultimately resulting in more well-rounded and thought-out outcomes (Kauppila et al., 2023). Additionally, teamwork fosters a sense of accountability, as each member plays a vital role in the group's success. This shared responsibility often leads to greater motivation and a stronger work ethic, as individuals are driven to meet the expectations of their teammates (Parnikh et al., 2022). Furthermore, teamwork improves communication skills, as team members must actively listen, provide constructive feedback, and engage in open discussions to ensure alignment and progress. Teamwork skills are

defined as the abilities that enable individuals to work effectively and harmoniously with others in a group setting to achieve shared objectives. These skills include communication, collaboration, problem-solving, active listening, and adaptability. Teamwork requires the ability to respect diverse perspectives, contribute to discussions, and support colleagues in completing tasks. By leveraging each team member's strengths, teamwork skills foster a productive, supportive, and efficient environment, ultimately enhancing the overall success of the group's efforts.

2.1.2.4 Adaptability Skills

Adaptability skills are defined as the ability to adjust to new conditions, challenges, or environments with ease and flexibility (Makmee, 2023). These skills involve being open to change, learning from experiences, and quickly shifting strategies when necessary. Malik et al. (2023) established that individuals with strong adaptability skills can thrive in dynamic and uncertain situations, demonstrating resilience, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. They are able to manage stress, embrace new technologies or approaches, and maintain a positive attitude in the face of setbacks, making them valuable assets in both personal and professional settings. Adaptability skills are characterized by a person's ability to adjust to new conditions, environments, and challenges with resilience and flexibility. These skills enable individuals to effectively navigate changes in their professional or personal life, whether they are adapting to a new job role, shifting market demands, or unexpected circumstances (Collins-Nelsen et al., 2022). A key aspect of adaptability is open-mindedness, as individuals with strong adaptability skills are willing to consider new ideas, methods, and perspectives. Additionally, it involves problem-solving abilities, where individuals identify solutions when faced with obstacles or unfamiliar situations (Omar et al., 2023).

Adaptability skills are crucial for success in an ever-changing world, offering numerous advantages in both personal and professional life. One of the most significant benefits of adaptability is the ability to handle uncertainty and change with resilience (Bonney et al., 2022). Yun and Lee (2023) postulated that in rapidly evolving environments, whether in the workplace, society, or in personal circumstances, being adaptable allows individuals to remain calm, focused, and effective even when faced with new challenges. This flexibility is especially valuable in the workforce, where industries, technologies, and market conditions shift regularly (Supriatna et al., 2023). Employees who can adapt to new tools, processes, or roles are more likely to thrive, contributing positively to their teams and organizations. Furthermore, adaptability fosters creativity and problem-solving. By embracing change, individuals are exposed to new perspectives and approaches, leading to innovative solutions and the ability to learn from diverse experiences (Sulistiyo, 2023). From the review of existing literature, the researcher defined adaptability skills as the ability to adjust effectively to new conditions, challenges, and environments. These skills encompass a range of competencies, including flexibility, resilience, and problem-solving abilities, enabling individuals to navigate change and uncertainty with ease. Adaptable individuals can quickly learn new tasks, shift priorities, and embrace innovative approaches, making them valuable in dynamic workplaces. This skill set is crucial for personal growth and professional success, as it fosters a mindset open to continuous learning and development in response to evolving circumstances.

2.1.2.5 Technical Skills

Technical skills are defined as the specific knowledge and abilities required to perform particular tasks or use certain tools and technologies effectively (Hakim et al., 2023). These skills encompass

a wide range of areas, including computer programming, data analysis, engineering, graphic design, and the operation of machinery or software applications. Shabahang et al. (2022) postulated that proficiency in technical skills often involves both theoretical understanding and practical application, enabling individuals to execute specialized functions in their field. As industries continue to evolve with advancements in technology, possessing strong technical skills is increasingly essential for career advancement and job performance, as they directly impact productivity and innovation (Kerluku et al., 2023). Technical skills are characterized by the specific knowledge and abilities required to perform tasks effectively in various fields, particularly those that involve the use of technology, tools, or specialized methods (Patnaik et al., 2022). These skills encompass a wide range of competencies, including proficiency in programming languages, software applications, data analysis, engineering principles, and technical writing. They are often developed through formal education, training programs, or hands-on experience in the workplace (Ma et al., 2022). Technical skills enable individuals to solve complex problems, optimize processes, and create innovative solutions, making them essential for job performance in industries such as information technology, engineering, healthcare, and manufacturing (Kasa et al., 2022).

Technical skills promote efficiency and productivity, as individuals who are adept at using software tools or machinery can streamline processes and reduce errors, resulting in higher quality outputs (Duncan et al., 2024). Furthermore, Sánchez-Sánchez (2022) stated that they empower individuals to solve complex problems independently, enhancing critical thinking and analytical abilities. In collaborative environments, team members with diverse technical skills can share knowledge and insights, leading to more effective teamwork and project outcomes (Güngör & Baydemir, 2023). Ultimately, the cultivation of technical skills not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the overall growth and competitiveness of organizations in the global marketplace (Jogerst et al., 2022). Technical skills are increasingly vital in today's digital and fast-paced world, offering numerous advantages across various sectors. Additionally, Adula et al. (2023) these skills enable professionals to adapt to new technologies and methodologies, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation. The researcher in this study defined technical as the specific abilities and knowledge required to perform particular tasks or utilize tools and technologies effectively. These skills encompass a wide range of disciplines, including programming, data analysis, engineering, and the operation of specialized equipment or software. Mastery of technical skills often results from formal education, training, and practical experience, enabling individuals to solve complex problems and improve efficiency within their fields. In today's rapidly changing job market, possessing strong technical skills is essential for career advancement, innovation, and maintaining competitiveness across various industries.

2.1.2.6 Work-Based Learning

According to Abdullah et al. (2023), work-based learning is defined as an educational approach that combines academic learning with practical, hands-on experiences in a workplace setting. This method allows individuals to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, enhancing their skills and competencies while gaining valuable insights into their chosen field. Gerhardt (2021) specified that work-based learning can take various forms, including internships, apprenticeships, co-op programs, and job shadowing, fostering a deeper understanding of workplace dynamics and expectations. By engaging in this type of learning, participants not only develop professional skills but also build networks and gain exposure to industry practices, ultimately preparing them for successful careers (Ismail et al., 2021; Kifta et al., 2022). Work-based learning is characterized by

an educational approach that integrates real-world work experience with academic instruction, aiming to enhance the skills, knowledge, and competencies of learners in a practical context (Al-Madadha et al., 2021). This method often involves partnerships between educational institutions and employers, allowing students to engage in internships, apprenticeships, or cooperative education programs where they can apply theoretical concepts to actual job situations (Negara & Hidayati, 2021). Through these experiences, learners gain valuable insights into workplace dynamics, professional expectations, and industry-specific practices, which can significantly boost their employability upon graduation. Work-based learning fosters the development of critical soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, alongside technical expertise, preparing individuals for the complexities of the modern workforce (Muftiyanto et al., 2021).

Work-based learning offers a multitude of advantages that significantly enhance both individual development and organizational effectiveness. One of the primary benefits is the practical experience it provides, allowing learners to apply theoretical knowledge gained in academic settings directly to real-world situations (Al-Sattar et al., 2023). This hands-on approach fosters deeper understanding and retention of skills, making participants more competent and confident in their abilities. Additionally, O'Malley et al. (2021) indicated that work-based learning facilitates the development of critical soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are essential in today's collaborative work environments. Employers often find that individuals who have undergone work-based learning are better prepared for the demands of the workplace, as they emerge with not only technical skills but also a strong sense of professionalism and work ethic (Jones et al., 2023). Furthermore, work-based learning fosters a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, as learners bring fresh perspectives and ideas to the workplace (Saleem & Chow, 2022). Also, the advantages of work-based learning extend beyond personal development to create a more competent and agile workforce, ultimately benefiting both individuals and organizations alike (Brenner & Dymond, 2023). In this study, the researcher defined work-based learning as an educational approach that combines academic instruction with practical experience in a real-world work environment. This model allows learners to apply theoretical knowledge directly to their field of study, enhancing their skills and competencies through hands-on experience. Work-based learning can take various forms, including internships, apprenticeships, cooperative education programs, and job shadowing. By engaging in this type of learning, participants gain valuable insights into workplace dynamics, develop professional networks, and better prepare for future career opportunities, making them more competitive in the job market.

2.1.2.7 Career Coaching

Career coaching is defined as a supportive and structured process aimed at helping individuals identify and achieve their professional aspirations. Through personalized guidance, career coaches work with clients to clarify their goals, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and develop actionable plans for career advancement. This process often includes exploring various career options, enhancing job search strategies, improving interview skills, and refining resumes (Ogakwu et al., 2023). By providing insights and accountability, career coaching empowers individuals to navigate transitions, overcome challenges, and build confidence in their professional journeys, ultimately leading to greater job satisfaction and fulfillment in their careers (Noël & Legrand, 2023). Career coaching is characterized by a personalized and supportive process aimed at helping individuals navigate their professional journeys and achieve their career goals. This

process typically involves one-on-one interactions between a coach and a client, where the coach provides guidance, feedback, and strategies tailored to the client's unique circumstances and aspirations (Ekwueme et al., 2023). Career coaching encompasses various elements, including self-assessment, skill development, and goal setting, allowing clients to gain clarity about their strengths, interests, and values. Coaches often assist clients in identifying potential career paths, enhancing job search techniques, and improving networking skills, as well as preparing for interviews and negotiating job offers (Ronkainen et al., 2022). Additionally, career coaching can address challenges such as career transitions, workplace issues, and professional development, empowering clients to make informed decisions and take proactive steps in their careers (Desormeaux, 2023).

Career coaching offers a range of advantages that can significantly enhance an individual's professional journey and overall job satisfaction. One of the primary benefits is the personalized guidance that career coaches provide, helping clients identify their strengths, weaknesses, and unique skill sets (Okeke & Elegbede, 2024). This tailored approach allows individuals to set realistic and achievable career goals, whether they are seeking to advance in their current roles, transition to new industries, or embark on entirely different career paths (Waddington & Jones, 2023). Moreover, career coaching often encompasses essential skills such as resume writing, interview preparation, and networking strategies, equipping clients with the tools necessary to navigate the competitive job market effectively. According to Graham and Blackett (2022), coaches also provide valuable insights into industry trends and employer expectations, enabling individuals to make informed decisions about their career trajectories. Additionally, Porter et al. (2023), the accountability factor inherent in coaching encourages clients to stay focused and motivated, fostering a proactive mindset toward their career development. This support can be especially beneficial during times of change or uncertainty, helping individuals build resilience and confidence in their abilities (Samora et al., 2022). Given the literature review, the researcher in this study defined career coaching as a professional guidance process that assists individuals in identifying and achieving their career goals. This tailored approach involves working with a coach to explore personal strengths, interests, and values while addressing challenges and opportunities in the job market. Career coaching often includes strategies for job searching, resume building, interview preparation, and skill development, providing clients with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their careers. Ultimately, career coaching aims to enhance self-awareness and confidence, enabling individuals to navigate their professional paths more effectively and pursue fulfilling careers.

Theoretical Underpinning

The underpinning theory for this study is the Skill Acquisition Theory, which provides a structured framework for understanding how individuals acquire and refine skills over time. Skill Acquisition Theory is a framework that explains how individuals learn and develop skills over time, particularly in the context of language learning and other cognitive and psychomotor domains. The theory was notably advanced by Robert DeKeyser, who published significant work on the topic in 2007 (Button et al., 2021). According to this theory, skill acquisition occurs in three stages: the cognitive stage, the associative stage, and the autonomous stage. In the cognitive stage, learners focus on understanding the basic components of the skill, often with significant guidance or instruction (Choo et al., 2024). During the associative stage, individuals refine their technique, reducing errors and becoming more efficient. In the final autonomous stage, the skill becomes

automatic, and the learner can perform the task with little conscious effort. Fitts and Posner's model suggests that as individuals progress through these stages, their performance improves, and their mental resources are increasingly devoted to more complex aspects of the task (Suzuki, 2024).

Skill Acquisition Theory is pertinent to the examination of employability skills and employment outcomes among university graduates in Nigeria, as it focuses on the processes through which individuals acquire and develop skills necessary for effective job performance. This theory posits that skill development occurs through a sequence of stages, including cognitive, associative, and autonomous phases (Barinua & Olatokunbo, 2022). For Nigerian graduates, understanding this progression is essential for identifying the specific skills needed in the labor market and for effectively engaging in training programs that enhance their employability. By applying Skill Acquisition Theory, researchers can assess whether graduates are adequately prepared to transition from academic learning to practical application in their chosen fields. Additionally, Skill Acquisition Theory emphasizes the importance of experiential learning and hands-on practice in fostering skill development. In the context of Nigeria, where many graduates may face a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical application, this theory highlights the need for educational institutions to incorporate experiential learning opportunities, such as internships and vocational training, into their curricula. By doing so, universities can better equip graduates with the relevant skills that employers seek, ultimately improving their employment outcomes. This theory also underscores the significance of continuous skill enhancement, encouraging graduates to engage in lifelong learning to adapt to the ever-evolving job market, thereby increasing their competitiveness and career prospects.

Conceptual Model

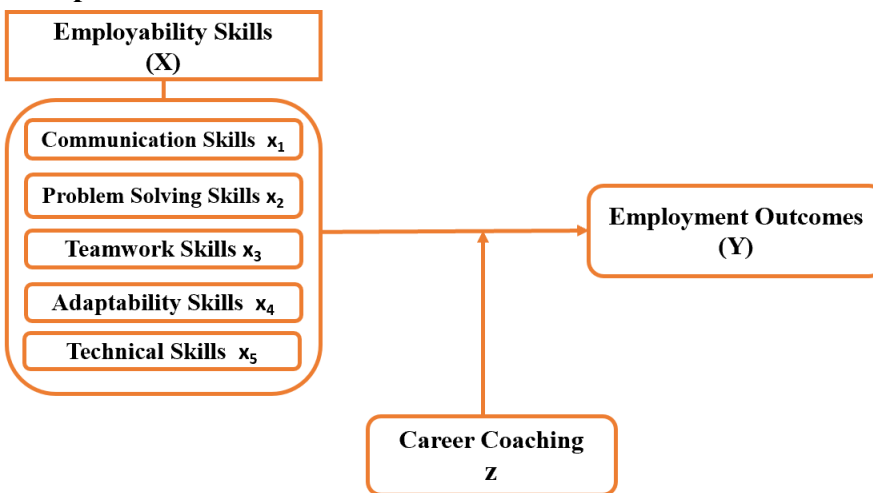


Figure: Conceptual Model for Employability Skills and Job Stability with Career Coaching as the Moderator

Source: Researchers' Conceptualization (2025)

Methodology

The study utilized a survey design, focusing on 64,171 graduates from six universities in South-West Nigeria. A sample of 497 participants was determined using the Research Advisor's sample

size table, selected through simple random sampling. Data was collected with a structured, validated questionnaire, showing Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients between 0.73 and 0.84 for the constructs. The response rate was 93.2%. Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics, including multiple linear and hierarchical regression, conducted at a 5% significance level.

Model Specification

Y = Dependent Variable

X = Independent Variable

Z = Moderator

Y = Job Stability (JS)

X = Employability Skills (ES)

Z = Career Coaching (CC)

Where

X = (x₁, x₂, x₃, x₄, x₅)

x₁= Communication Skills (CS)

x₂= Problem Solving Skills (PSS)

x₃= Teamwork Skills (TS)

x₄= Adaptability Skills (AS)

x₅= Technical Skills (TS)

z = Career Coaching (CC)

And

Y = Employment Outcomes (EO)

Regression Model

The models formulated for each of the hypotheses are written as:

$$EO = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ES + \beta_2 CC + \beta_{12} ES * CC + \varepsilon_i \text{----- Equ. 1}$$

Results and Discussion

A total of 497 questionnaires were distributed to graduates from selected universities in South-West Nigeria. Of these, 463 questionnaires, representing 100% of the distributed copies, were returned and deemed suitable for analysis. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 27.0, with a 5% significance level set for all statistical tests to meet the study's objectives.

Restatement of Research Hypothesis Eight

H₀: Employability skills have no significant effect on employment outcomes when moderated by career coaching.

Table 1a: Model Summary of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.485 ^a	.235	.234	8.14536	.235	141.967	1	461	.000
2	.667 ^b	.445	.442	6.95050	.209	173.126	1	460	.000
3	.671 ^c	.450	.446	6.92507	.005	4.384	1	459	.037
a. Predictors: (Constant), Employability Skills									
b. Predictors: (Constant), Employability Skills, Career Coaching									
c. Predictors: (Constant), Employability Skills, Career Coaching, EO * CCt									

Source: *Researcher's Field Survey, 2025*

Table 1b: ANOVA of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9419.099	1	9419.099	141.967	.000 ^b
	Residual	30585.951	461	66.347		
	Total	40005.050	462			
2	Regression	17782.728	2	8891.364	184.050	.000 ^c
	Residual	22222.322	460	48.309		
	Total	40005.050	462			
3	Regression	17992.987	3	5997.662	125.064	.000 ^d
	Residual	22012.063	459	47.957		
	Total	40005.050	462			
a. Dependent Variable: Employment Outcomes						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Employability Skills						
c. Predictors: (Constant), Employability Skills, Career Coaching						
d. Predictors: (Constant), Employability Skills, Career Coaching, EO * CCt						

Source: *Researcher's Field Survey, 2025*

Table 1c: Coefficients of the Variables

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	40.221	7.853		5.122	.000
	Employability Skills	.721	.060	.485	11.915	.000
2	(Constant)	29.410	6.751		4.356	.000
	Employability Skills	.352	.059	.237	5.996	.000
	Career Coaching	2.282	.173	.520	13.158	.000
3	(Constant)	-34.587	31.295		-1.105	.270
	Employability Skills	.856	.248	.576	3.456	.001
	Career Coaching	4.930	1.276	1.124	3.863	.000
	EO * CCt	-.021	.010	-.825	-2.094	.037
a. Dependent Variable: Employment Outcomes						

Source: *Researcher's Field Survey, 2025*

Interpretation

Table 1 presents the results of hierarchical regression analysis. The results of Model I showed that R^2 was 0.235 and adjusted R^2 was 0.234. This implies that employability skills explained 23.4% variation in the employment outcomes of selected university graduates in Ogun State. In model II,

with the inclusion of career coaching, R^2 increased from 0.235 to 0.445 ($R^2\Delta = 0.209$) with the adjusted R^2 was 0.442. Therefore, employability skills and career coaching explained 44.2% of the variation in employment outcomes of selected university graduates. In model III, R^2 was 0.450, while adjusted R^2 was 0.446 with the introduction of the interaction variable. The R^2 change was 0.005 (i.e., $R^2\Delta = 0.005$) and was statistically significant. This implies that the interaction of employability skills and career coaching revealed a significant effect on employment outcomes, suggesting that career coaching does moderate the effect of employability skills on employment outcomes.

Tables 1b showed an F statistic [$F(1,462)$] of 141.967 with $p < 0.05$ for Model 1. This implies that employability skills have a significant effect on the employment outcomes of selected university graduates in Ogun State, Nigeria. Model II, which included career coaching as a moderating variable, showed an F statistic [$F(2,462)$] of 184.050, $p < 0.05$. This implies that employability skills and career coaching affect the employment outcomes in the selected university graduates and this shows that the overall model was significant. Therefore, employability skills and career coaching play a significant role in the employment outcomes of selected university graduates in Ogun State, Nigeria. However, Model III, which introduced the interaction term with the independent variable, had an F statistic of $F(3,462) = 125.064$, $p < 0.05$. This implies that the fitted model of employability skills is fit for prediction.

Table 1c shows the regression coefficient results for three models. In Model I, the results revealed that employability skills ($\beta = 0.721$, $t = 11.915$, $p < 0.05$) had a positive and significant effect on employment outcomes of selected university graduates in Ogun State. The results in model II revealed that both employability skills ($\beta = 0.352$, $t = 5.996$, $p < 0.05$) and career coaching ($\beta = 2.282$, $t = 13.158$, $p < 0.05$) had positive and significant effects on employment outcomes of selected university graduates in Ogun State. In Model III, the interaction variable ($\beta = -0.021$, $t = -2.094$, $p < 0.05$) is negative and statistically significant. This implies that career coaching has a moderating effect. The interaction of career coaching with employability skills revealed a moderating effect on employability skills and employment outcomes. The results therefore suggest that career coaching do moderate the effect of employability skills on employment outcomes supporting the *apriori* expectation.

The regression equation from the analysis is stated as follows:

$$EO = 40.221 + 0.856ES + 4.930CC + -0.021(ES*CC) \text{ ----- Eqn.1}$$

Where:

EO = Employment Outcomes

ES = Employability Skills

CC = Career Coaching

ES*CC = Interaction Variable

The results in Table 1a-c and equation 1 indicated that career coaching has a moderating effect on the relationship between employability skills and employment outcomes of selected university graduates in Ogun State, Nigeria. Based on the coefficient of the interaction variable and the findings, null hypothesis seven (H_0) which states that employability skills have no significant effect on employment outcomes when moderated by career coaching was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study's finding that employability skills significantly affect employment outcomes when moderated by career coaching aligns closely with a robust body of research emphasizing the interplay between skill development and guided support. Dhaliwal and Misra (2020) highlighted that employability skills like customer service, teamwork, and problem-solving are critical for career progression in the hospitality industry, suggesting that these skills, when nurtured through targeted guidance such as coaching, enhance employment success. Similarly, Hains-Wesson and Ji (2020) found that global study tours foster cultural intelligence, leadership, and networking skills, significantly boosting students' preparedness for international careers outcomes that could be amplified with career coaching to refine and apply these competencies effectively. Kamaroellah et al. (2021) further reinforced this by identifying communication, teamwork, and technical expertise as key employability skills shaped by education and experience, implying that coaching could serve as a moderating factor to optimize their impact on employment outcomes. These studies collectively suggest that employability skills, when supported by structured guidance, align with the study's findings on improved employment prospects. Similarly, Omojola et al. (2025) found that employability skills have significant effect on job in selected universities in South-West Nigeria. The study concluded that employability skills influenced job stability in selected universities in South-West Nigeria.

This alignment is evident in educational and professional training contexts as well. McGunagle and Zizka (2020) showed that STEM employers value analytical skills, communication, and teamwork, with graduates excelling when these skills are well-developed a process that career coaching could enhance by bridging gaps between academic training and workplace demands. McHenry and Krishnan (2022) found that integrating employability skills like leadership and communication into engineering curricula boosts workforce readiness, an effect likely magnified by coaching to tailor these skills to specific career paths. Scott and Willison (2021) demonstrated that reflective practices increase students' awareness and confidence in their employability skills, suggesting that career coaching could further refine this self-assessment into actionable employment strategies. These findings indicate that employability skills, when paired with coaching, significantly enhance employment outcomes, resonating with the study's moderated effect.

The role of digital and industry-specific skills further supports this narrative. Smaldone et al. (2022) revealed that data scientists with strong data analysis, programming, and communication skills are highly employable, a potential amplified by coaching to align these skills with employer expectations in the digital economy. Suarta et al. (2024) found that accounting employers prioritize digital literacy and analytical skills, with coaching potentially moderating the application of these skills to secure better job outcomes. Osman et al. (2025) noted that Malaysian employers value communication, problem-solving, and teamwork alongside technical competencies, suggesting that career coaching could enhance graduates' ability to leverage these skills for employment success across sectors. These studies collectively highlight that employability skills, when guided by coaching, lead to superior employment outcomes, aligning with the study's moderated framework.

Career development initiatives and specialized populations provide additional evidence of this alignment. Salape and Cuevas (2020) showed that career development learning enhances decision-making and career planning skills among high school students, preparing them for workforce

transitions an effect that coaching could strengthen by providing personalized guidance. Ningsih et al. (2021) found that technical proficiency, communication, and interpersonal skills improve employment prospects for beauty students, with hands-on training and soft skills development suggesting a role for coaching to maximize these outcomes. Nitecki et al. (2022) demonstrated that employability skills, particularly career adaptability, significantly affect reemployment for cancer survivors, with targeted training and potentially coaching playing a key role in reintegration. These findings underscore that employability skills, when moderated by career coaching, significantly enhance employment outcomes across diverse groups, mirroring the study's conclusions.

The integration of coaching as a moderating factor is further validated by innovative approaches and broader employability trends. Noël and Legrand (2023) found that distance coaching improves career advisors' practices, enhancing clients' employability skills and outcomes by overcoming logistical barriers an approach that aligns with the study's emphasis on coaching's moderating role. Soundararajan et al. (2020) highlighted global employers' demand for digital skills, cross-cultural competence, and flexibility, suggesting that coaching could refine these skills for international job markets. Othman et al. (2022) identified communication, adaptability, and problem-solving as predictors of career adaptability, with coaching potentially amplifying their impact on employment success. These studies collectively affirm that employability skills, when supported by career coaching, lead to improved employment outcomes, providing a consistent parallel to the study's moderated effect across varied contexts and methodologies.

Relating these findings to Skill Acquisition Theory, the alignment is theoretically sound. Akintayo et al. (2021) describe skill acquisition as a progressive process involving knowledge acquisition, practice, and mastery, reflected in McHenry and Krishnan (2022) and Suarta et al. (2024), where structured training builds employability skills, with coaching moderating their application for employment success. Rathee and Mittal (2024) emphasize that contextual learning and feedback refine skills, aligning with Scott and Willison (2021) and Noël and Legrand (2023), where reflective practices and coaching enhance skill awareness and effectiveness, boosting outcomes. Opesemowo et al. (2025) highlight that repeated practice in relevant settings solidifies expertise, a principle mirrored in Hains-Wesson and Ji (2020) and Nitecki et al. (2022), where experiential learning and targeted support, moderated by coaching, optimize employability skills for employment. Thus, the study's findings that employability skills affect employment outcomes when moderated by career coaching not only aligns with empirical research but also embodies Skill Acquisition Theory, illustrating how guided skill development enhances workforce success.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The hierarchical regression analysis conducted on university graduates in Ogun State, Nigeria, reveals that employability skills significantly influence employment outcomes, with career coaching serving as a key moderating factor that strengthens this relationship. The findings confirm that employability skills, when combined with career coaching, substantially enhance employment outcomes, and the interaction between these variables further supports this effect. The statistically significant interaction term leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that career coaching amplifies the impact of employability skills. This suggests that structured guidance through career coaching enables graduates to better leverage their skills to achieve improved employment prospects.

To optimize employment outcomes, universities and career development centers in Ogun State should integrate robust career coaching programs into their educational and graduate support frameworks. These programs should focus on enhancing key employability skills, such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and technical expertise, while offering tailored coaching to align these skills with labor market needs. Policymakers and institutions should prioritize training career coaches and fostering industry partnerships to ensure coaching relevance and effectiveness. Graduates should also be encouraged to actively engage in career coaching initiatives to better navigate the job market and enhance their employment opportunities.

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In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the pivotal role that employability skills namely communication skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, adaptability skills, and technical skills play in shaping the employment outcomes of university graduates in Ogun State, Nigeria, particularly when these skills are enhanced through the moderating influence of career coaching. The significant positive effects observed highlight how these competencies not only equip graduates with the practical abilities needed to navigate the competitive job market but also bridge the gap between academic qualifications and real-world employability demands. For instance, strong communication and teamwork skills foster better interpersonal dynamics in professional settings, while problem-solving and adaptability enable graduates to thrive amid economic uncertainties and rapid technological changes prevalent in Nigeria's evolving labor landscape. Moreover, the moderating effect of career coaching amplifies these impacts by providing personalized guidance, skill refinement, and strategic career planning, which ultimately leads to higher rates of job placement, career progression, and overall job satisfaction among graduates. This interplay suggests that without such interventions, even well-developed skills may not yield optimal results, emphasizing the need for integrated support systems in higher education. Overall, these results contribute to the broader discourse on graduate employability in developing economies, affirming that a holistic approach combining skill development with targeted coaching can significantly mitigate unemployment challenges and enhance economic productivity in regions like Ogun State.

Based on these insights, it is recommended that universities in Ogun State, and potentially across Nigeria, prioritize the integration of employability skills training into their curricula, while mandating comprehensive career coaching programs to maximize their effectiveness on employment outcomes. Educational institutions should collaborate with industry stakeholders to design skill-specific modules that align with market needs, incorporating experiential learning opportunities such as internships, workshops, and simulations to cultivate communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and technical proficiencies from the early stages of undergraduate studies. Policymakers at the state and federal levels ought to allocate resources for funding career coaching initiatives, including the establishment of dedicated career centers equipped with trained counselors who can offer individualized mentoring, resume building, interview preparation, and networking strategies tailored to local economic contexts. Additionally, ongoing research should be encouraged to evaluate the long-term impacts of these interventions, with metrics tracking not just immediate employment rates but also career sustainability and wage levels. Employers, on their part, could contribute by participating in university-led programs to provide feedback on skill gaps and offer apprenticeships, fostering a symbiotic relationship that benefits both graduates and the workforce. By implementing these recommendations, Ogun State

can serve as a model for enhancing graduate employability, ultimately driving socio-economic development and reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria.

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