UNITED IN DIFFERENCES: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: AN INSIGHT IN TO USMANU DANFODIYO UNIVERSITY, SOKOTO

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of workforce diversity on organizational performance at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS). The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design. A total of 341 respondents were selected from a population of 3,056 using Krejcie and Morgan's sample determination table. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, specifically, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) with the aid of IBM SPSS Version 27. The correlation results revealed a significant positive relationship between gender diversity and organizational performance and a moderate positive relationship between ethnic and regional diversity and organizational performance. These findings imply that equitable gender representation and inclusive ethnic participation enhance collaboration, creativity, and institutional effectiveness. The study concludes that workforce diversity, when properly managed, constitutes a valuable organizational resource that drives productivity, innovation, and sustainable institutional advancement. It therefore recommends that the university management should strengthen gender inclusion policies through fair promotion and recruitment practices, and ensure balanced ethnic representation in leadership positions to foster a more cohesive, innovative, and high-performing academic environment.

Keywords: Workforce Diversity, Gender Diversity, Ethnic And Regional Diversity, Organizational Performance, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

1. INTRODUCTION

University performance is typically assessed through research output, teaching quality, innovation capacity, societal impact, and global ranking positions (Times Higher Education, 2025). These metrics not only reflect academic excellence but also determine institutional reputation and competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. Recent data suggest that Nigerian universities are making notable progress in these dimensions. Between 2020 and 2023, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) produced 7,025 publications by 5,813 authors, while the University of Ibadan (UI) followed closely with 6,978 publications by 4,732 authors (Legit.ng, 2024). UI also reclaimed its status as Nigeria's top institution in the 2026 Times Higher Education World University Rankings, placing in the 801–1,000 global band alongside the University of Lagos (WithInNigeria, 2025; The Nation, 2025). These patterns underscore a growing research culture and hint at Nigeria's latent potential in global scholarship.

Nevertheless, significant performance gaps persist both nationally and regionally. Of Nigeria's nearly 300 universities, only three are listed among the top 1,000 globally, whereas South Africa and Egypt are far better represented, with 11 and 20 institutions respectively in the 2026 QS rankings (Vanguard, 2025). Moreover, eight Egyptian universities appeared in the 2024 ARWU (Shanghai) top 1,000 list (CSR Egypt, 2024). These disparities signal Nigeria's lag in critical ranking dimensions such as citation impact, international outlook, alumni influence, and institutional reputation (Punch NG, 2025). At Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS), the story is similar. According to EduRank (2025), UDUS has generated 5,908 publications and garnered 35,655 citations, yet it ranks 4,633rd globally and 33rd nationally. While this demonstrates moderate scholarly activity, it also reveals limited global visibility and weaker influence beyond academia.

These performance challenges are rooted in structural and managerial constraints. Chronic underfunding, weak research infrastructure, and procedural inefficiencies hamper productivity across many Nigerian universities (Okebukola, 2023; World Bank, 2024). A lack of strong international partnerships, minimal industry linkages, and insufficient policy support for innovation further weaken institutional competitiveness (Akinyemi, 2022; Punch NG, 2025). At UDUS, such constraints manifest in delayed promotions, scarce grants, and restricted access to global academic networks, reducing the university's ability to compete in research and reputation.

Importantly, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended) reinforces the principle of inclusiveness and fair representation in public institutions. Specifically, Section 14(3) of the Constitution mandates the composition of public organizations to reflect the federal character of Nigeria, ensuring that no group is marginalized in national affairs. This constitutional provision underscores the ethical and legal imperative for workforce diversity, promoting equity, unity, and effective representation across all sectors, including higher education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

In this environment, workforce diversity presents a strategic pathway for improvement. Studies have shown that diversity across dimensions like gender, ethnicity, academic background, and age can enhance creativity, decision quality, and organizational innovation when inclusively managed (Onuorah, 2024; Nwaoma, 2024). For example, research in Nigeria's public sector suggests that inclusion and fairness in diversity management positively influence employee commitment and performance (Ekejiuba et al., 2023; Nwaoma, 2024). Therefore, by managing workforce diversity thoughtfully and equitably, UDUS can harness "unity in difference" to mitigate constraints of funding, infrastructure, and visibility, thereby improving research output, administrative efficiency, student success, and national/global ranking standing.

1.1 Research Hypotheses

H_{O1}: There is no significant relationship between gender diversity and the performance of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

H_{O2}: There is no significant relationship between ethnic and regional diversity and performance of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Workforce Diversity

Workforce diversity refers to inclusion of individuals with varied demographic, cultural, professional, and experiential backgrounds such as including gender, age, ethnicity, educational background, and values. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, workforce diversity can involve hiring and promotion of staff from different ethnic zones, gender balance in leadership, and bringing together academics from a variety of disciplines. Empirical evidence indicates that workforce diversity, when properly managed, enhances innovation, decision making, and performance by bringing multiple perspectives (Ogundipe, Awolaja, Fayomi, Otulana, & Awokoya, 2024).

2.1.2 Gender Diversity

Gender diversity means equitable representation and inclusion of all gender identities in teaching, administrative, and leadership roles. For example, Dataphyte reports that out of approximately 270 universities in Nigeria, only 12 have female Vice-Chancellors ($\approx$ 4.4%) as of February 2025. This underrepresentation imposes constraints on inclusive decision-making and limits the full use of talent; yet studies show that universities with more gender diversity in leadership tend to perform better in research output and governance (Ogundipe et al., 2024; Women Times, 2025).

2.1.3 Ethnic and Regional Diversity

Ethnic and regional diversity denotes inclusion of people from different ethnic groups and regions, ensuring representation and inclusion of Nigeria's diverse population. This kind of diversity can reduce groupthink, promote local knowledge in research, encourage collaboration across regions, and improve relevance of university programmes to community needs. While specific empirical studies in UDUS are few, related studies in Nigeria (e.g., Ogun State private universities) show that diversity in ethnic background (among non-teaching staff) has a statistically significant positive relationship with human resource performance (Ogundipe et al., 2024).

2.1.4 Organizational Performance in Tertiary Institutions

Organizational performance in the higher education context refers to how well a university meets its missions in research, teaching, student outcomes, operational efficiency, and its standing in national and global rankings. In Nigeria, research shows that human resource variables including workforce diversity (age, gender, educational background) significantly influence performance among non-teaching staff in private universities (Ogundipe et al., 2024). Also, studies in other sectors (e.g. MTN Nigeria) demonstrate that diversity and inclusion strategies correlate with improved employee productivity and motivation, which in turn enhance organizational performance (Abu, NKPurukwe, Joda, & Nwokah, 2025).

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Gender Diversity and Organizational Performance

Gender diversity has emerged as a significant factor influencing organizational success, though findings remain mixed across contexts. According to Ali, Kulik, and Metz (2021), gender-diverse teams tend to exhibit higher innovation and creativity, as diverse viewpoints stimulate broader problem-solving and enhance group adaptability. Similarly, Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, and Michel (2018), in a meta-analytic review published in the Academy of Management Annals, found that gender diversity in leadership positions positively affects firm profitability through improved decision-making and enhanced employee engagement. Al-Saidi, Al-Jabri, and Al-Kiyumi (2023) analyzed 250 Gulf-region firms and observed that organizations with greater female representation in executive roles demonstrated stronger governance and market valuation. In the African context, Fapohunda (2022) revealed that gender-inclusive policies in Nigerian higher education institutions foster collaboration, increase research productivity, and enhance institutional reputation. Conversely, Mensah and Adomako (2023) cautioned that without a supportive and inclusive organizational culture, gender diversity may generate communication barriers and role ambiguity, ultimately dampening performance outcomes.

Despite this growing body of evidence, there remains limited empirical investigation into gender diversity within Nigerian universities—particularly concerning its measurable impact on research output, teaching quality, and global visibility. Most existing studies are firm-oriented and overlook the academic sector's structural and cultural particularities. This study therefore addresses this contextual gap by exploring how gender diversity influences institutional performance outcomes at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS), within Nigeria's federal university system.

2.2.2 Ethnic Diversity and Organizational Performance

Ethnic diversity constitutes another crucial determinant of organizational effectiveness, particularly in multicultural societies. Alesina and La Ferrara (2021) found that ethnic heterogeneity, when effectively managed, enhances creativity, innovation, and economic performance, but when poorly handled, can undermine cooperation and collective efficiency. Similarly, Bassett-Jones (2020) emphasized that ethnically diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones in innovation-driven environments, as they integrate diverse cognitive frameworks into problem-solving. In higher education, Ohemeng and Adusah-Karikari (2022) demonstrated that ethnic diversity in Ghanaian universities broadens academic collaboration, fosters intercultural competence, and strengthens institutional reputation. In contrast, Gündoğdu and Özkan (2023) found that unmanaged ethnic diversity may lead to workplace tension and reduced productivity, underscoring the importance of inclusive leadership and transparent diversity management.

Regional evidence further supports these findings. Babalola, Nwosu, and Adeola (2021) showed that ethnic inclusion in Nigerian organizations promotes employee trust, reduces turnover intentions, and indirectly improves productivity and innovation. However, most of these studies are situated in the corporate or public service domains, with limited empirical focus on academia. Consequently, there is a dearth of research exploring how ethnic and linguistic diversity within Nigerian universities influences key performance indicators such as research output, collaboration, administrative efficiency, and global rankings. Addressing this gap, the current study investigates how workforce diversity across gender, ethnicity, and other demographic dimensions can enhance institutional performance at UDUS.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV), initially articulated by Barney (1991), posits that an organization's sustainable competitive advantage arises from its possession and effective utilization of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources. These resources include not only tangible assets but also intangible ones such as knowledge, skills, culture, and human capital. According to RBV, organizational performance depends on how these resources are deployed and managed to create value and differentiation within the market or institutional environment.

In the context of workforce diversity, RBV suggests that a diverse workforce represents a strategic resource that enhances innovation, adaptability, and decision-making quality. Diverse employees contribute varied experiences, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches, which, when effectively integrated, generate unique organizational capabilities that competitors cannot easily replicate (Barney, 2020; Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001). This heterogeneity, therefore, becomes a source of creative synergy and improved performance outcomes.

Empirical evidence supports this theoretical link. Richard, Kirby, and Chadwick (2013) found that diversity contributes to superior firm performance when combined with an inclusive culture that leverages differences for innovation. Similarly, Cox and Blake (1991) argued that well-managed diversity can yield strategic advantages through cost reduction, creativity, marketing flexibility, and improved system performance. In the higher education

context, diverse academic and administrative staff can broaden the institution's knowledge base, enhance research collaboration, and attract international partnerships, all of which strengthen institutional ranking and reputation.

However, RBV also implies that diversity alone does not automatically lead to superior performance. The value of workforce diversity depends on management's ability to integrate and harness differences toward common institutional goals (Barney & Clark, 2007). This means that for universities like Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS), diversity must be supported by inclusive policies, equitable opportunities, and effective communication systems to translate demographic variety into performance gains.

3. METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional correlational research design was adopted to examine the impact of workforce diversity on organizational performance at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. The study population consisted of 3,056 staff members, 1,232 academic and 1,824 non-academic, according to the UDUS Academic Planning Unit (2024). Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, a representative sample of 341 respondents was selected using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation of both academic (137) and non-academic (204) staff. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire adapted from Cox and Blake (1991) and McMillan-Capehart (2005), comprising three sections: Section A covered demographic information; Section B measured gender diversity (5 items) and ethnic diversity (5 items); while Section C measured organizational performance (5 items), all on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument's content validity was established through expert review by two scholars in Human Resource Management and one senior university administrator to ensure clarity, coverage, and relevance to the research objectives. A pilot study was conducted at the Federal University Birnin Kebbi to test the reliability of the adapted instrument, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeded the 0.70 threshold, confirming internal consistency. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. While tests for normality (via skewness and kurtosis) and multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted, their detailed results are presented in the data analysis section. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations were used to summarize responses, and the formulated null hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 level of significance.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Preliminary Data Screening

A total of 341 questionnaires were distributed to academic and non-academic staff of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Out of these, 236 were retrieved, representing a response rate of 69.2%. After data screening, 202 questionnaires were deemed valid and used for analysis, while 34 were discarded due to incomplete or inconsistent responses. The valid responses were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.

4.1.1 Test of Normality

The assumption of normality was examined using skewness and kurtosis statistics. As shown in Table 4.1, all computed skewness and kurtosis values fell within the acceptable range of ±2, as recommended by George and Mallery (2019). This indicates that the data for all constructs were approximately normally distributed and suitable for parametric statistical analysis.

Table 1: Normality Test: Test of Skewness and Kurtosis

Constructs	N	Skewness		Kutosis	
		Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Gender Diversity (GD)	202	-.569	.171	.440	.341
Ethnic and Regional Diversity (ERD)	202	-1.081	.171	1.884	.341
Organizational Performance (OP)	202	-1.117	.171	1.200	.341

Source: SPSS Output, (2025)

The Table 1 result shows a negative skewness values for all constructs indicate slightly left-skewed distributions, while the kurtosis values demonstrate moderate peakedness. However, all statistics remain within acceptable limits, confirming normality.

4.1.2 Test of Multicollinearity

To determine whether intercorrelations among the independent variables posed a problem for the analysis, multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted using Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). As shown in Table

4.2, all Tolerance values are above 0.1 and all VIF values are below 10, indicating the absence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2: Test of Multicollinearity: Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Constructs	N	Tolerance	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)
Gender Diversity (GD)	202	.408	2.452
Ethnic and Regional Diversity (ERD)	202	.916	1.092

Source: SPSS Output, (2025)

The Table 2 results confirm that both independent variables (gender and ethnic diversity) are sufficiently distinct and can be included in further analyses without redundancy issues.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the respondents' perceptions of the main constructs. Table 4.3 presents the mean and standard deviation for each variable.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Variables: Mean and Standard Deviation

Constructs	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender Diversity (GD)	202	1.00	5.00	3.312	0.714
Ethnic and Regional Diversity (ERD)	202	1.00	5.00	2.986	0.765
Organizational Performance (OP)	202	1.00	5.00	3.408	0.698

Source: SPSS Output, (2025)

The Table 3 shows that, the mean score for gender diversity (M = 3.31, SD = 0.71) suggests that respondents perceive gender inclusivity as moderate, reflecting the underrepresentation of women in some departments. Ethnic and regional diversity recorded a lower mean score (M = 2.99, SD = 0.77), implying that regional dominance and favoritism may affect perceptions of inclusivity. Organizational performance recorded a moderate mean (M = 3.41, SD = 0.70), indicating that despite challenges in workforce diversity, the university maintains satisfactory performance levels.

4.3 Inferential Statistics: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC)

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypothesized relationships at a 0.05 significance level.

Table 4: Correlation Results for Workforce Diversity (Gender and Ethnic/Regional Diversity) and Organizational Performance

		GD	ERD	OP
GD	Pearson Correlation	1	.070	.190[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.322	.007
	N	202	202	202
ERD	Pearson Correlation	.070	1	.264[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.322		.000
	N	202	202	202
OP	Pearson Correlation	.190[**]	.264[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.000	
	N	202	202	202

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, (2025)

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to examine the relationships among gender diversity, ethnic/regional diversity, and organizational performance. The results in Table 5 indicate that both gender diversity (r = 0.190, p = 0.007 < 0.05) and ethnic/regional diversity (r = 0.264, p = 0.000 < 0.05) have significant positive relationships with organizational performance. This implies that increases in workforce diversity dimensions are associated with improvements in the university's performance outcomes. However, the correlation between gender

and ethnic diversity (r = 0.070, p = 0.322 > 0.05) is not significant, suggesting that each diversity dimension independently contributes to performance.

4.5 Test of Hypotheses

This section presents the testing of the study's hypotheses using the correlation results in Table 5. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed at a 0.05 level of significance (2-tailed).

H_{O1}: There is no significant relationship between gender diversity and the performance of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

The correlation results show that gender diversity has a positive and statistically significant relationship with organizational performance (r = 0.190, p = 0.007 < 0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{o1}) is rejected. This indicates that an increase in gender diversity through equitable recruitment, promotion, and participation of both male and female staff contributes positively to performance outcomes. Although the relationship is weak, it implies that promoting female representation can enhance collaboration, creativity, and decision-making quality, thereby improving the overall institutional performance of UDUS.

H_{O2}: There is no significant relationship between ethnic diversity and the performance of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

As shown in Table 5, ethnic and regional diversity also has a positive and statistically significant relationship with organizational performance (r = 0.264, p = 0.000 < 0.05). Hence, the null hypothesis (H_{o2}) is rejected. This suggests that as ethnic and regional inclusiveness increases through fair representation in leadership roles, transparent recruitment, and cross-regional collaboration, the university's performance improves. The moderate positive relationship indicates that diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives can stimulate innovation, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance institutional productivity when well managed.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the influence of workforce diversity, specifically gender and ethnic/regional diversity on organizational performance within Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS). The results reveal that both gender and ethnic/regional diversity are positively and significantly correlated with institutional performance, suggesting that diversity serves as a critical organizational resource when inclusively managed.

Gender diversity and performance of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

The first hypothesis tested the relationship between gender diversity and organizational performance. The correlation analysis (r = 0.190, p = 0.007 < 0.05) indicates a weak but positive and statistically significant relationship, implying that greater gender representation contributes to improved institutional outcomes. Although the relationship strength is modest, it remains theoretically consistent with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which posits that human capital diversity when effectively utilized enhances innovation, adaptability, and strategic decision-making (Barney, 1991; Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001). This finding aligns with Ali, Kulik, and Metz (2021) and Hoobler et al. (2018), who demonstrated that gender-diverse organizations often experience enhanced creativity and decision quality. However, the weak strength of the correlation could reflect contextual realities at UDUS, where certain academic departments reportedly have limited female representation, thereby constraining the full performance benefits of gender diversity. As Mensah and Adomako (2023) noted, without a supportive institutional culture, gender diversity may not yield its optimal impact, a situation that may apply within the current university environment. Nonetheless, the finding highlights that even incremental progress in female inclusion can enhance collaboration, broaden perspectives, and support more balanced leadership, ultimately improving institutional effectiveness.

Ethnic diversity and the performance of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

The second hypothesis examined the relationship between ethnic and regional diversity and organizational performance. The results (r = 0.264, p = 0.000 < 0.05) show a moderate, positive, and significant correlation, indicating that increased ethnic inclusiveness and equitable representation enhance performance outcomes. This aligns strongly with empirical evidence from Alesina and La Ferrara (2021) and Babalola, Nwosu, and Adeola (2021), who found that well-managed ethnic diversity fosters trust, innovation, and productivity. Within the context of UDUS, this suggests that fair representation of staff across different ethnic and regional backgrounds enhances communication, interdepartmental cooperation, and institutional harmony, thereby improving research productivity and administrative efficiency. Conversely, anecdotal observations that non-indigenous staffs face barriers in leadership positions might partially limit the potential benefits of diversity. This reflects Gündoğdu and Özkan's (2023) caution that unmanaged ethnic diversity can breed exclusion and tension, negatively affecting organizational cohesion. Nonetheless, the positive correlation observed in this study implies that ethnic diversity remains a valuable institutional resource when

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inclusion and fairness are ensured, consistent with RBV's assertion that diverse human capital constitutes a source of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 2020).

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of workforce diversity, specifically gender and ethnic/regional diversity on the organizational performance of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS). The findings demonstrated that both gender and ethnic/regional diversity have positive and statistically significant relationships with institutional performance. Gender diversity exhibited a weak yet meaningful influence, implying that greater inclusion of women in academic and administrative positions contributes to improved collaboration, decision-making, and institutional outcomes. Meanwhile, ethnic and regional diversity showed a moderate positive relationship with performance, indicating that fair representation of different ethnic and regional groups enhances communication, trust, and organizational harmony.

These results align with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which posits that diversity in human resources serves as a strategic asset capable of fostering innovation, adaptability, and sustained competitive advantage when properly managed. However, the relatively low level of gender inclusion and perceived regional imbalance in leadership suggest that UDUS has not fully leveraged its diversity potential. Therefore, diversity management at UDUS should not be viewed merely as a compliance requirement but as a deliberate strategic tool for institutional growth. Ensuring equitable participation of all demographic groups can strengthen teamwork, creativity, and collective performance ultimately enhancing the university's academic and administrative excellence.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

• The Management of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, through the Academic Planning and Human Resource Units, should develop and enforce a gender inclusion policy that promotes equitable recruitment, promotion, and participation of female staff in academic and administrative leadership. This can be achieved through deliberate mentoring and capacity-building initiatives designed to prepare women for decision-making roles. By institutionalizing gender-sensitive leadership practices, the university will foster a more balanced and innovative work environment that enhances performance across departments.

• The University Governing Council, in collaboration with the Senate and Appointment Committees, should ensure transparent and merit-based leadership selection processes that provide equal opportunities for staff from all ethnic and regional backgrounds. This can be operationalized by establishing clear diversity benchmarks for committee compositions and leadership appointments. By promoting fairness and representation, the university can reduce perceived marginalization, improve intergroup relations, and strengthen organizational cohesion, thereby translating workforce diversity into sustained institutional performance.

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