

# Exploring the Phenomenon of Library Anxiety in Higher Education Students: A Review

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## ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the phenomenon of library anxiety, examining its various aspects, impact on students, and strategies for mitigation. Library anxiety refers to the uneasiness of library user when using a library. To explore the literature on Library Anxiety, the study employs three prominent databases, Scopus, Library Literature & Information Science-EBSCOhost, and LISA-Proquest. Specific criteria were established before the literature, focusing on peer-reviewed works related to academic libraries. The criteria for article selection included relevance to the central objective of the review. The search terms “Library Anxiety,” “Library Anxiety in academic library” and “Library Anxiety Scale” were effectively utilised to filter articles. Mellon’s 1986 work provided a foundational definition and identified major factors contributing to library anxiety. Subsequent research, Bostick in 1992 developed LAS and its validation and used across the different countries. Notably by Onwuegbuzie and Jiao has linked library anxiety to various psychological traits. Anwar was given a contribution on the cultural implication of library anxiety. It suggests integrating discussions on library anxiety into library instruction and librarian-student interactions to create a more supportive and welcoming environment. Further research is encouraged to continue with modern technology like AI and chatbot to effectively combat library anxiety.

**Keywords:** Library anxiety; Library anxiety scale; Review; Library phobia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Students must utilise their library to gain essential information for their academic learning and research needs in the higher education system. The lack of competence, feelings of inadequacy, and negative emotions, including tension and psychological barriers during visits to the library. ‘It is an uncomfortable feeling or emotional disposition experienced in a library setting with cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioral ramifications’ revealed by Mellon<sup>1</sup>. Their research, Jiao<sup>2</sup> defines ‘library anxiety as an unpleasant and discomforting feeling marked by worry, confusion, tension, and helplessness that surfaces when a student is in a library environment.

Anjaline<sup>3</sup> emphasises that library anxiety caused by negative emotions can hinder the effective utilisation of library resources, particularly for individuals new to the experience. Stressing the significance of tackling this concern, Anjaline & Saravanan<sup>4</sup> discussed the need for corrective actions to alleviate library anxiety among undergraduate students. This approach considers factors such as information literacy skills and previous experience. A focused study Jiao & Onwuegbuzie<sup>5</sup> conducted a study to find out that library anxiety within the international student community and identifies mechanical and affective barriers as the primary dimensions of this phenomenon.

Expanding on this idea, Carlile<sup>6</sup> conducted an in-depth examination of the existing literature on library anxiety, pinpointing its varied cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioral repercussions (p. 136). Moreover, the research found the effect of library anxiety is harmful on students’ behavior. This includes their reluctance to students in library tours and information literacy classes, conducting searches during information and a general hesitancy to seek assistance from librarians. Students’ library anxiety is characterised as being anxious, frustrated, and helpless as well as tense, uneasy, burdened by self-defeating thoughts, uncertain, and mentally disorganised as investigated by Jiao & Onwuegbuzie<sup>7</sup>.

Shelmerdine<sup>8</sup> initiated a study to examine personal anecdotes of feeling anxious in libraries due to unwelcoming staff and confusing environments. These experiences are in different settings, indicating a widespread issue within library culture.

## 1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the phenomenon of library anxiety by reviewing existing literature to understand the phenomenon of anxiety experienced by library users, particularly students, during visiting, utilising library resources, which can affect their information-seeking behavior and overall academic performance. Previous research provides both empirical and theoretical evidence

on library anxiety. However, a comprehensive literature review addressing the various aspects of library anxiety is still needed. It is anticipated that such an in-depth study will offer valuable insights into the state of library anxiety. Although some studies are available, they were conducted over a decade ago by Cleveland<sup>9</sup>. Prior reviews have focused on reference librarians, and physical layout of the library, interacting with staff explored by Gardijan<sup>10</sup>, Bibliographic instruction are helping to reduce library anxiety among users examined by Dilinika<sup>11</sup>. No review research has been conducted on the efficacy of technological interventions on library anxiety, personalisation and user experience, Augmented Reality (AR) technology, Virtual Reality (VR), virtual library tours, game mechanics in reducing library anxiety in the digital era. This gap highlights the need for updated research in these areas.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In the comprehensive exploration of Library Anxiety literature, three databases such as Scopus, Library Literature & Information Science-EBSCOhost and LISA-Proquest, were employed. The research uses these three databases to capture a broad range of literature on Library Anxiety from different perspectives and disciplines. For the literature survey, set a specific time range, e.g., from 1986 to 2023, to ensure that the literature is current and relevant to contemporary issues. In this context, the critical criteria for selecting articles were that they be peer-reviewed and focused on academic libraries. To refine the articles from these journals, the terms searched “Library Anxiety,” “Library Anxiety in academic library,” and “Library Anxiety Scale” were effectively utilised. Document types like books, book reviews, letters, editorials, and business articles were excluded to refine the results.

## 3. LIBRARY ANXIETY

Library anxiety is a psychological fear experienced by library users, characterised by negative emotions like tension, fear, uncertainty, and helplessness, hindering effective library resource utilisation defined by Adeeko<sup>12</sup>. Psychological fear hindering effective library resource utilisation, characterised by negative emotions, tension, fear, and helplessness discussed by Anjaline<sup>3</sup>.

Mellon's pioneer work in 1986 defined and delved into the complexities of library anxiety. She characterizes library anxiety as a “negative affective state associated with the use of libraries” (p. 160). This encapsulating definition has garnered widespread acceptance, becoming a cornerstone of this phenomenon's discourse. She further pinpoints in her research work acts as a catalyst for action.

Some of the researchers examine the concept of library anxiety, which has been classified as situational anxiety. This classification has been highlighted by Mech & Brooks<sup>13</sup> and Jerabek, Meyer & Kordinak<sup>14</sup>. These scholars have conceptualised that library anxiety is an anxiety that arises specifically in situational circumstances and cannot be linked to generalised anxiety sickness.

It manifests only when individuals anticipate using the library. Before exploring the idea of library anxiety, it is essential to grasp the broader context of academic anxiety, which encompasses a variety of concerns, including library anxiety.

Onwuegbuzie assumed that library anxiety states people encounter while in a library setting, influencing their cognition, emotions and behavior. This phenomenon includes various negative psychological barriers such as tension, uncertainty, helplessness, fear, negative, self-defeating thoughts, and mental disarray that are specifically felt within the library setting. The presence of library anxiety significantly hampers a user's ability to effectively engage in the process of looking for library information and overall research performance. Abusin and Zainab<sup>15</sup> provided the concept that students identified several key dimensions, including negative perceptions towards the library environment, staff, and services, as well as affective and cultural and cognitive barriers.

## 4. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF LIBRARY ANXIETY

### 4.1 Early Observations (Mid-20th Century)

Library anxiety emerged in the mid-20th century when librarians and researchers noticed that some library users, particularly students, exhibited signs of discomfort or anxiety when using libraries. Early observations focused on the behavioral and emotional aspects of this anxiety. In 1972, Swope and Katzer<sup>16</sup> assumed through interviews that students at their university felt intimidated by the library and were reluctant to ask for help from library staff. Similarly, in 1982, Kosa<sup>17</sup> conducted a survey among university students in Australia and found that they experienced comparable feelings of intimidation and hesitancy in seeking assistance from librarians.

### 4.2 Constance Mellon's Research (1986)

Mellon conducted the first time defining library anxiety. She categorised it into six dimensions: ‘barriers with library staff,’ ‘affective barriers,’ ‘comfort with the library,’ ‘knowledge of the library,’ ‘mechanical barriers,’ and ‘barriers with technology.’ Her qualitative research work identified that many students perceive the library as an intimidating and overwhelming environment, leading to avoidance behaviors and a lack of confidence in their search abilities in the library.

### 4.3 Expanding Dimensions (1990s-1999)

The 1990s marked a significant expansion of Mellon's groundwork on library anxiety, with researchers investigating additional dimensions and contributing factors. Bostick<sup>18</sup> developed in 1992 as Library Anxiety Scale, which is quantitative measurement used in a better way. Many authors developed a scale in their respective countries based on Bostick's Scale. Onwuegbuzie<sup>5</sup> in his continuous research took a closer look at the link between library anxiety and trait anxiety in graduate students. Mech and

Brooks' findings that library anxiety operated independently of trait anxiety. Further investigations by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie<sup>19</sup> in the year of 1996 sought to pinpoint characteristics in college students that forecast levels of library anxiety. The subsequent studies by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie<sup>20</sup> on 108 graduate students at a small mid-southern university linked higher levels of library anxiety to traits such as irresponsibility, lack of perseverance, visual orientation, and hands-on learning preferences. Anwar, Kandari and Qallaf<sup>21</sup> library anxiety is crucial in understanding the psychological barriers that individuals may face when utilising library services, it can hinder information-seeking behavior and negatively impact the overall library experience.

#### 4.4 Technological Advancements and the Digital Age

As libraries adopted digital technology and electronic resources into their operations and services, library anxiety expanded to encompass concerns and fears related to information literacy, navigating online catalogs, and utilising electronic databases. The shift towards a more technologically-driven library environment necessitated a re-evaluation and adaptation in the comprehension and resolution of library anxiety in the digital age. Kwon<sup>22</sup> identified key factors contributing to this anxiety, including difficulties in navigating digital resources, lack of familiarity with digital platform and incompetence of information retrieval

##### 4.4.1 Digital Libraries and e-Resources on Library Anxiety

The shift towards digital libraries has significantly altered the landscape of library anxiety. Studies now examine how online databases, e-books, and digital archives impact user anxiety. For instance, research shows that while digital resources can reduce anxiety related to physical navigation of the library, they may introduce new anxieties related to digital literacy and the complexity of search interfaces. Husaini<sup>23</sup> explored the relationship between users' behaviors towards ICT and their levels of library anxiety. It found that positive attitudes towards ICT could help reduce library anxiety, suggesting that familiarity and comfort with technology play a critical role in users' library experiences. Ren<sup>24</sup> examined the impact of library instruction on students' self-efficacy in electronic information searching. It concluded that structured library instruction significantly boosts students' confidence and proficiency in navigating electronic resources, thereby reducing anxiety.

##### 4.4.2 Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) on Library Anxiety

Augmented Reality (AR) overlays digital information, such as images, sounds, or other data, onto the real-world environment in real time. This enhancement is achieved through devices like smartphones, tablets, or AR glasses. In contrast, Virtual Reality (VR) immerses users in a completely virtual environment, feel as physically

present in that world. These technologies can guide users through the library by providing on-screen directions and information overlays. For example, the University of Maryland Libraries in College Park, Maryland, USA, have used AR to create interactive exhibits and displays that offer additional information and multimedia content related to library collections. VR can offer immersive tours of the library, allowing users to explore the layout and facilities before their visit. Different academic libraries are offering VR services, such as the VR Studio at North Carolina State University Libraries and the VR and AR studio at the Health Sciences Library of the University of Washington Enis<sup>54</sup>.

Virtual Reality has emerged as a tool to alleviate library anxiety by providing immersive orientation experiences. VR tours can familiarise users with library layouts and resources without the pressure of physical presence, thereby reducing anxiety. Preliminary studies indicate that VR tours are effective in increasing user confidence and decreasing feelings of intimidation. The results showed that these technologies could significantly reduce library anxiety by providing immersive and supportive learning experiences Sample<sup>25</sup>. Kannegiser<sup>26</sup> explored the impact of augmented reality (AR) library orientations on users' anxiety and self-efficacy. It found that AR orientations could significantly decrease anxiety levels and improve self-efficacy, providing an engaging and supportive introduction to library resources.

##### 4.4.3 Mobile Applications on Library Anxiety

Library mobile apps designed to assist with resource discovery and navigation are gaining popularity. These apps often include features such as search functionalities, floor maps, and chat support, which can help mitigate anxiety by offering immediate assistance and making library services more accessible. Xu<sup>27</sup> explored the factors influencing users' intentions to continue using a library mobile app. It found that ease of use, perceived usefulness, and user satisfaction are critical determinants, with positive experiences leading to reduced anxiety and increased usage intentions.

#### 4.5 Research on Library Anxiety in 21st Century

Throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and until now, analysis of library anxiety has persistently progressed and advanced. The use of good-quality measures for assessing information-related anxieties explored by Naveed, Jan and Anwar<sup>28</sup>. Scholars formulated and implemented various effective strategies and approaches to assist individuals in overcoming the distress and unease associated with library anxiety. These strategies include the development and implementation of library instruction programs and the initiation of digital literacy initiatives. Furthermore, librarians have actively taken on a more proactive role in addressing the emotional and psychological dimensions of library anxiety, thus creating an environment that is more inviting to the well-being and comfort of library users Gogoi, Singson and Thiyagarajan<sup>29</sup>.

## 5. MEASURING LIBRARY ANXIETY

Table 1 illustrates various scales have been developed to measure this phenomenon across different cultural contexts. The table provided lists several Library Anxiety Scales (LAS) along with their authors and countries of origin. Here is a detailed discussion of each entry:

Library Anxiety Scale (LAS) by Bostick, 1992, USA, the scale is one of the pioneering tools designed to measure library anxiety first developed for quantitative instruments. Sharon Bostick developed the original LAS to identify the sources of anxiety experienced by college students using libraries. The scale has been widely adopted and forms the basis for many subsequent adaptations. Hebrew-Library Anxiety Scale (H-LAS) by Shoham and Mizrachi, 2001, adapted from Bostick's original LAS, this version is tailored for Hebrew-speaking users. It addresses specific cultural and linguistic factors affecting library anxiety in Israel, providing a more relevant tool for assessing anxiety levels among Hebrew-speaking students. Multidimensional Library Anxiety Scale (MLAS) by Kampen, 2004, expanded on Bostick's work by developing the MLAS, which takes a multidimensional approach to library anxiety. This scale considers various dimensions such as affective barriers, comfort with the library environment, and staff approachability, offering a more nuanced understanding of library anxiety. Kuwaiti-Library Anxiety Scale (K-LAS) by Anwar, *et al.*, in the year of 2004, this adaptation was designed to reflect the unique cultural and educational environment of Kuwait. The K-LAS incorporates elements relevant to Kuwaiti students, such as their experiences with library services and technology in the context of Kuwaiti academic institutions. Polish Library Anxiety Scale (P-LAS) by Świgoń, 2011, this scale takes into account the specific educational practices and library usage patterns in Poland, providing insights into the challenges faced by Polish students in their academic libraries. AQAK by Anwar, *et al.* in 2011, Anwar and colleagues developed another scale named AQAK, this indicates ongoing efforts to refine the measurement tools and adapt them to better suit the needs of Kuwaiti students. Information

Seeking Anxiety Scale by Efrannamesh, *et al.* in the year of 2012, this scale focuses specifically on the anxiety related to information seeking, a critical component of library use. Developed in Iran, it addresses the unique cultural and educational contexts influencing Iranian students' experiences with information retrieval and library resources. Chinese Library Anxiety Scale (C-LAS) by Song, *et al.* 2014, the C-LAS was tailored for Chinese academic environments. Song and colleagues adapted the original LAS to reflect the cultural, educational, and technological contexts of Chinese universities, aiming to provide a relevant tool for measuring library anxiety among Chinese students. Greek Library Anxiety Scale (G-LAS) by Doris, *et al.*, 2017, this adaptation for Greek students addresses the specific cultural and academic factors influencing library anxiety in Greece. The G-LAS provides insights into how Greek students perceive and interact with their academic libraries, helping to identify areas for improvement in library services. Croatian-Library Anxiety Scale (CRO-LAS) by Gardijan, 2023, the most recent addition to the list, the CRO-LAS, is designed for Croatian students. Gardijan's work reflects an effort to understand the specific sources of library anxiety in Croatian academic settings, incorporating local cultural and educational nuances.

## 6. IMPACT OF LIBRARY ANXIETY AMONG STUDENTS

Library anxiety is a significant issue among students that can negatively impact their academic performance and overall educational experience. Here are some key points discussing the impact of library anxiety:

### 6.1 Technical Barriers

Technical barriers emerge to the manifestation of Library Anxiety among students. Onwuegbuzie, Jiao and Bostick<sup>37</sup> insightful assumption has illuminated that challenges rooted in technology and tools tend to evoke a heightened sense of anxiety, particularly among graduate students in comparison to their undergraduate counterparts. Erfanmanesh shed light on students' affect

Table 10. Measuring library anxiety

S. No	LAS	Author	Country
1	Library Anxiety Scale	Bostick <sup>37</sup>	USA
2	Hebrew-Library Anxiety Scale H-LAS	Shoham & Mizrachi <sup>30</sup>	Israel
3	Multidimensional Library Anxiety Scale (MLAS)	Kampen <sup>31</sup>	USA
4	Kuwaiti-Library Anxiety Scale (K-LAS)	Anwar <sup>32</sup> , <i>et al.</i>	Kuwait
5	Polish Library Anxiety Scale P-LAS	Świgoń <sup>33</sup>	Poland
6	AQAK	Anwar <sup>34</sup> , <i>et al</i>	Kuwait
7	Information Seeking Anxiety Scale	Efrannamesh <sup>35</sup>	Iran
8	Chinese Library Anxiety Scale C-LAS	Song, Zhang & Clarke <sup>36</sup>	China
9	Greek Library Anxiety Scale G-LAS	Doris <sup>31</sup>	Greece
10	Croatian-Library Anxiety Scale (CRO-LAS)	Gardijan <sup>10</sup>	Croatia



anxiety in navigating library equipment and technical devices. Sookhtanlo<sup>38</sup> described how it directly impacts students' behavior by using computers to search information related to books and resources.

## 6.2 Language Barriers

When examining the impacts of language barriers on Library Anxiety, Sinnasamy and Karim<sup>39</sup> emphasised that the experience of being exposed to a large number of resources in the English language can induce feelings of anxiety in individuals who are not native English speakers. Correspondingly, Jiao and Onwuegbuzie<sup>40</sup> assumed that library anxiety tends to significantly decrease their self-confidence due to lack of fluency of English language and those who do not have English as their mother tongue.

## 6.3 Personnel Barrier

The attitudes displayed by the staff members who work at the library, as well as the absence of clear and comprehensive instructions provided by the library, may significantly impact the phenomenon known as library anxiety. Singson, Firdaus and Thiyagarajan<sup>41</sup> revealed through this study lack of knowledge regarding where to locate various resources within the library. These factors, which underlie students' fears and anxieties while in the library, have been identified as key contributors to library anxiety. Additionally, Bostick in 1992, research findings revealed that the primary source of anxiety for students was the existence of barriers in their interactions with library staff members because of anxiety among students.

## 6.4 Library Environment

Brown<sup>42</sup> have reported that disturbances caused by noise in libraries can be attributed to various factors, including layout, size and space, and regulations. Onwuegbuzie in the year of 1998, identify learning-modality preferences and learning styles as antecedents of library anxiety, with students who prefer quiet surroundings, structure, and visual information being more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety.

# 7. REMEDIAL STRATEGIES OF LIBRARY ANXIETY

## 7.1 Library Orientation

Generally, these users are unaware of how to locate this information effectively. Lacking proficiency, students may hesitate to utilise the library as a resource. In that case, these negative emotions can escalate into a state of library anxiety. Scholars have identified knowledge, emotional factors, the information search process, and user education as significant components of the library anxiety explained by Ren<sup>24</sup>. Numerous studies have demonstrated that these instructions can reduce library anxiety and enhance information literacy as mentioned by Mellon. Recognising the significance of this approach, universities have integrated library or bibliographic instruction sessions or courses into their academic curricula Van Scoyoc<sup>43</sup>.

## 7.2 Interaction with Library Staff

As stated by Ahmed and Aziz<sup>44</sup>, one of the factors that can contribute to an increase in library anxiety among students is the perception that the librarian is too busy to offer assistance in utilising the library. McPherson<sup>45</sup> acknowledges that directly engaging with a librarian is key to alleviating library anxiety. The consensus among researchers fostering relationships between students and library staff is crucial in building a library environment that promotes comfort, confidence, and a positive attitude toward utilising resources. Furthermore, such interactions create an opportunity to establish rapport and lay the groundwork for future interactions with the library explained by Carlile<sup>6</sup>.

## 7.3 Library Tour

Oling and Mach<sup>46</sup> research findings affirm the traditional guided tour remains the prevailing preference among library visitors. Library survival guide plays a crucial role in addressing library anxiety among new students by familiarising them with library resources and services, thus reducing negative emotions and uncertainties associated with using the library assumed by DiPrince<sup>47</sup>.

## 7.4 Effective Physical Environment

It should be noted that the physical environment of a library, including factors such as the arrangement of spaces, shelves, lighting, the positioning of reference or information desks, and the presence of reading rooms, layout, ventilation can have a profound influence on the levels of library anxiety experienced by students Jan, Anwar, and Warraich<sup>48</sup>. Therefore, the meticulous organisation and design of the library environment, aimed at creating a more user-friendly and well-guided setting help the reader to reduce library anxiety while using various services and resources of the library. To help students familiarise themselves with library layouts and services before physically visiting, which reduces feelings of fear and confusion Priyanto<sup>49</sup>

## 7.5 Assist with Printing Non-print Resources

In the contemporary age, where information-seeking is predominantly web-centric, the often overlooked realm of printed leaflets, brochures, and guides is uniquely positioned to address library anxiety. Onwuegbuzie<sup>5</sup> underline the effectiveness of these tangible materials that have demonstrated their ability to prevent and reduce library anxiety, particularly in those initial stages. Striking a balance between online and offline resources ensures that libraries cater to their user base's diverse needs and preferences, fostering an inclusive environment that addresses, rather than exacerbates, library anxiety. Therefore, it is important to consider providing users with easily accessible and comprehensible information through leaflets, brochures, and guides.

## 8. DISCUSSION

High levels of library anxiety can severely impair students' research abilities and overall academic performance. Recognising this, several assumptions have been proposed to mitigate library anxiety. Library orientation will help fresher newcomers to reduce library anxiety. These programs help students become familiar with the library layout, resources, and services Sari & Sayekti<sup>50</sup>. Librarians play a crucial role in reducing library anxiety among students by implementing various strategies. Studies have shown that approaches prioritising empathy, honesty, and librarian contact can help alleviate library anxiety Lackner & Kneedler<sup>51</sup>. Encouraging a positive outlook towards information and communication technology (ICT) can enhance students' willingness to use digital library resources found by Husaini. Nowadays, most students are using smartphones, user-friendly mobile applications or Library apps like 'Know your library' can facilitate easier access to library resources and services, influencing students' intention to continue using the library and make a strategy to reduce Library anxiety explained by Xu. Augmented Reality (AR) technology can provide immersive and interactive orientations, significantly reducing anxiety levels and boosting students' confidence and self-efficacy discussed by Kannegiser. Virtual library tour will assist students to reduce library anxiety and it will make it more effective Kirsch<sup>52</sup>. The study highlighted that game mechanics such as points, badges, and leaderboards played a crucial role in this improvement of library anxiety among the students Sureephong<sup>53</sup>, *et al.*

## 9. CONCLUSION

Library anxiety is a significant psychological barrier to effective library use and academic success, characterised by feelings of confusion, and inadequacy in navigating library resources while staying in the library. The review paper highlights various contributing factors, measuring validated scale, lack of familiarity with the library environment, insufficient competence. Effective interventions, such as library orientation programs, personalised librarian assistance, and the integration of information literacy into their course curriculum. Furthermore, fostering a welcoming and supportive library atmosphere, virtual orientation, virtual tour in library, mobile app (know your library), handbook of library can reduce library anxiety among the students. The review emphasises the importance of ongoing research to better understand library anxiety and develop targeted strategies to address it. By addressing library anxiety, educational institutions can enhance supporting their academic achievements and promote lifelong learning skills.

## 10. RECOMMENDATION OF FURTHER RESEARCH

In the context of library anxiety, further research could focus on developing a deeper understanding of the psychological and situational factors contributing to this phenomenon. Such studies could explore the interplay

between individual personality traits and the unique challenges posed by library environments. Investigating the impact of digital literacy on library anxiety is another promising area such as AI tools and Chabot. In other developing countries, Indian researchers can explore the India-Library Anxiety Scale (I-LAS). In addition, qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, can offer a deeper, more nuanced understanding of individual experiences. Researchers can also explore library anxiety across diverse demographics, including age, cultural background, and educational level, would also contribute significantly to the literature.

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