

Primary School Teachers' Perceptions on Continuous Professional Development for Digital Technology Integration in Teaching and Learning in Mauritius

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Abstract

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is essential for equipping primary school teachers in Mauritius, a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), with the skills to integrate digital technology effectively into teaching and learning. This study explores the perceptions of primary school teachers regarding CPD in the context of Mauritius, where education reforms and the impacts of climate change demand innovative and resilient approaches to learning. A sample of 25 teachers following an undergraduate course in Education acted as participants. Through a qualitative approach (analysis of online discussions and focus group interviews), the research examines teachers' experiences, challenges, and expectations of CPD programs, focusing on their alignment with the evolving technological landscape. The UNESCO document "Six pillars for the digital transformation of education" was used as conceptual framework and a thematic approach was adopted for analysis of findings. The findings reveal a complex interplay of enthusiasm and challenges. While teachers acknowledge the potential of CPD to enhance digital literacy and pedagogical practices, barriers such as limited access to infrastructure, insufficient training opportunities, and lack of localized digital resources hinder meaningful integration. Teachers also highlight the need for tailored CPD programs that address their specific classroom realities and align with the national vision of transforming Mauritius into a knowledge economy. This study underscores the critical role of CPD in bridging the digital divide and fostering inclusive education in Mauritius. It recommends collaborative efforts among stakeholders to design sustainable CPD initiatives that leverage digital tools and support lifelong learning. These insights contribute to the discourse on education reform in SIDS, emphasizing resilience and equity in the face of global and local challenges.

Background and context

Mauritius is classified as a Small Islands Developing State (SIDS) (UNDP, 2022). The vulnerabilities of SIDS have been well-documented in terms of climate change and sea-level rise, and other environmental threats (Doorga, 2022). Indeed, events such as extreme weather conditions and COVID-19 have caused school closures and have caused educational authorities to look for technological solutions to sustain schooling (Leihy, Singh, Oojorah, & Buzduga, 2025). However, the lack of teacher and infrastructure preparedness has been underscored by Atchia and Chinnapah (2022). Likewise, Mauritius has declared economic goals such becoming a Cyber Island (Ramessur, 2009) and a Knowledge Hub in Higher Education (Knight & Motala-Timol, 2022).

To this effect, mitigating the effects these vulnerabilities and realising national aspirations are linked to issues of sustainability, education and national development. Indeed, teacher professional development is key to the behavioural and systemic changes that favour climate-friendly approaches (Bascopé et al, 2025) and on digital transformation goals (Stringer et al, 2025). This study focuses on how CPD was implemented to attain digital transformation goals that would in turn build resilience to face SIDS challenges. Indeed, the technological landscape is evolving, providing teachers with unprecedented array of tools. However, digital literacy is a prerequisite for teachers to be able to deploy innovative and resilient teaching strategies.

In this context, the past decade has seen the inception and implementation of the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education reforms (NYCBE) (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, 2016). This reform documents contains a panoply of measures to promote the digital literacy of teachers. One of the key measures was the introduction of tablets to improve teaching and learning in Primary Schools (Sharma,

2021). Aside from tablets, there were also initiatives to promote learning in digital environments such as the C-Delta programme from the Commonwealth of Learning (Goody, 2021). However, it is imperative to evaluate how the recipients of these CPD initiatives viewed these programmes. This is the rationale for this study. Teachers' conceptualisations of CPD, their purpose and outcomes have come under the research lens in this study.

Literature Review

CPD for Primary Education around the world

The Continuous Professional Development of teachers is presented differently in various literature, but the focus always revolves around teachers' continuous learning for improving the teaching and learning nexus with the aim of benefiting the students. Berhanu (2024) points out that professional development for teachers pushes schools to work towards excellence. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in education is an ongoing process which allows different stakeholders to improve their skills, knowledge and effectiveness throughout their careers (Dhungana et al., 2024).

Heyward et al. (2018) stated that the teacher views CPD to optimize professionalism and to improve their professional status and income. However, policy makers have a different understanding of CPD. They believe that CPD helps in improving the system while enhancing learning outcomes (Heyward et al., 2018). CPD in education is thus usually an ongoing process which focuses on improving skills, knowledge, and effectiveness, to align with the requirements of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. In that regard, different stakeholders in education constantly undergo CPDs to be at par with high teaching standards, educational research, and policy, meeting the changing needs. However, Heyward et al. (2018) also argued that CPD can be an expensive waste of money if not planned and implemented correctly. They further added that teachers generally learn as a community of practice. CPDs can be critical if the networking component is missing. Solomon and Gulie (2019) conducted research on the implementation of CPD and its impact of educational quality in Ethiopia and they confirmed that the implementation of teachers' CPD was greater than expected in areas such as access to new ideas, sharing of experiences and professional interactions. CPD programs have been implemented in many countries around the world and the focus was mainly on collaborative learning, mentoring and rethinking teacher evaluation to adapt to the changing global educational landscape (Collison et al., 2009). Saleem (2021) confirmed that teachers who followed CPD programs recognized their positive effect on their professional practices. Thus, CPDs are crucial for transformation in Education.

CPD in Mauritius

Santally et al. (2015) conducted research in Mauritian primary schools whereby they came up with a social partnership model to promote CPD of educators in the country using formal and informal capacity-building initiatives. Their findings resonate with those of Heyward et al. (2018) and Solomon and Gulie (2019) who argued on the importance of networking for successful implementation of CPD in education. They pointed out that the model fits into a 4P innovation framework where Public, Private, People, and Partnership are essential elements for teacher professional development.

Flore & Govender (2021) also did research on professional development in Mauritian Secondary schools and concluded that face-to-face CPDs are not always successful due to their theoretical nature and one-size-fits-all approach. They argued that teachers' experiences on professional development, performance expectancy, effort expectancy and facilitating conditions are important factors that need to be considered while planning and implementing CPDs for teachers. Heyward et al. (2018) findings corroborate with Flore's and Govender's (2021) outcomes whereby they also believed that trainings carried "en masse" (in large groups) are rarely effective as participants become passive recipients of the training and do not contribute much to the content, delivery and focus. They called this approach a 'hit' and 'run' approach, and they argued that it is rarely successful. They pointed out that professional learning requires a supportive environment and it is an iterative process. They believed that training activities should be planned in series, infusing practical tasks, reflection and supervised practice, mentoring, and

coaching. They termed it as 'in-on-in'. They further argued that CPDs without follow-up and mentoring can lead to teacher anxiety.

CPD programs, focusing on their alignment with the evolving technological landscape

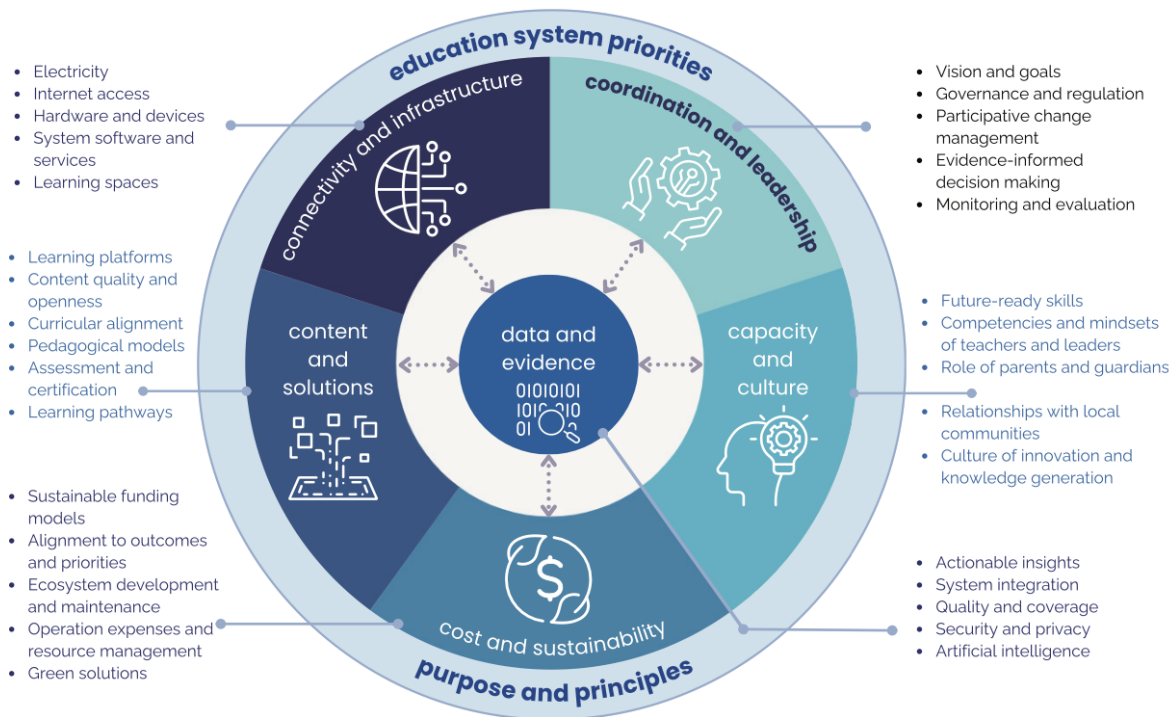
We are living in a world where innovation is at the crux of progress, which implies that technological advancements are essential for professional growth. Petar (2024) argues that CPD programs can support teachers in adopting innovative teaching methods, but face challenges in aligning content with evolving technological needs. He added that leveraging technology, promoting collaboration and providing adequate support through coaching and mentoring are future orientations of CPD. This will allow for CPD to address the diverse needs of educators and play a pivotal role in driving educational innovation and thus meet the demands of the 21st century learners (Petar, 2024). Furthermore, Napitupulu et al. (2024) are of the opinion that effective teacher development programs need to integrate technology and pedagogy. Their findings revealed that for effective teacher professional development programs, strategies like blended learning and professional learning communities should be adopted. Napitupulu et al. (2024) argued that there is an urgent need to have a shift in teaching practices and teacher mindsets, sustained by required institutional policies that advocate innovation and adaptability. They also underline that the teacher professional development programs should focus on technological fluency and pedagogical mastery as these are skills that educators should develop to meet the demands of the 21st century learners. Correspondingly, Bradshaw et al. (2012) developed a CPD program for teachers in England called the Vital Program and concluded that the program was successful because of its innovative bottom-up approach. The Vital Program encouraged teachers' reflective practice and responded to teachers' needs to meet the demands of the 21st century. Collaborative professional development can be enhanced through the application of Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Liu et al., 2015). However, time constraints, inadequate funding and misalignment with practical needs have profound impact on successful implementation of CPD for teachers (Petar, N.V., 2024). Tackling these challenges is crucial to fully realizing the potential of CPD in driving educational innovation and improving student outcomes.

The UNESCO document "Six pillars for the digital transformation of education"

Digital transformation (DT) in education refers to the integration of digital technologies to improve teaching, learning, and institutional operations. Various frameworks have been developed to support this transformation. Some focus on the key drivers, tools, and outcomes across micro, mezzo, and macro levels in engineering education (Lyngdorf et al., 2024), while others highlight critical information system success factors such as enterprise architecture and digital leadership (Tungpantong et al., 2021). Additionally, certain models position DT within broader organizational development strategies to enhance the digital maturity of educational institutions (Furjan et al., 2018). Comprehensive dimensions of DT in higher education have also been proposed to offer a more integrated understanding of the transformation process (Udovita, 2020). Together, these frameworks underscore the importance of a systematic and holistic approach to digital transformation, addressing technological, pedagogical, and organizational elements to better equip students for future demands and to boost institutional effectiveness.

Several authors discuss UNESCO's *Six Pillars for the Digital Transformation of Education* in their research papers and reports. They provided discernments on its application and relevance in varied educational arena and teacher professional development amongst others. An analytical report by UNESCO IITE and Shanghai Open University (2022) provided insights on how the six pillars for Digital Transformation of Education are successfully integrated to promote teaching, learning and professional development. The study was done on 36 cases from 11 countries. Moreover, Allouche (2024) presents how the French education system uses a systems approach to digital transformation. These pillars are closely aligned through coordinated efforts in policy, infrastructure, and pedagogical innovation. Another study underscores UNESCO's human-centered strategy, focusing on leadership, equity, and sustainable digital practices. Collectively, these studies affirm the framework's relevance and adaptability in supporting continuous professional development and broader educational reform through a structured, inclusive, and future-ready approach.

For this study, the UNESCO document *"Six Pillars for the Digital Transformation of Education"* was used. This framework is a guide to integrating digital technologies into the education system. It emphasizes equity, inclusivity, and sustainability. The six pillars are (1) Digital Infrastructure (2) Digital Content and Curriculum (3) Digital competencies of teachers and educators (4) Effective and inclusive digital pedagogy (5) Leadership, Policy, and Governance and (6) Education Innovation and Digital Transformation.



Note. Adapted from the Digital Transformation Collaborative. (2024). <https://www.unesco.org/en/global-education-coalition/digital-transformation-collaborative>. © UNESCO

Figure 1: Core elements of the six pillars for the digital transformation of education

UNESCO, UNICEF and ITU proposed three keys to unlock the potential of digital learning: connectivity, capacity and content at the Transforming Education Summit in 2022 (Normén-Smith et al., 2024). They argued that digital learning is located within a wider digital ecosystem and for digital transformation to happen, three key elements are essential to unlock the potential of digital transformation in education namely: coordination and leadership; cost and sustainability; and data and evidence. Together, these six pillars provide a comprehensive roadmap for digital transformation that goes beyond simply introducing technology, focusing instead on systemic change to improve quality, equity, and efficiency in education. The UNESCO *Six Pillars for the Digital Transformation of Education* framework was selected to analyze data from Mauritian primary school educators for various reasons. First, it offers a clear, comprehensive and structured lens to examine the multiple dimensions of digital transformation, all of which are directly relevant to the realities faced by primary educators. Second, the framework focuses on key elements that are crucial in addressing the digital divide and supporting CPD in various contexts. Third, the relevance of the model and its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 on quality education, make it an appropriate and adaptable tool for analyzing educational practices in diverse settings, including Mauritius. Finally, this framework is well suited for conducting a systemic analysis of teachers' experiences within the wider institutional and policy-level dynamics, thereby offering rich insights into how digital transformation can be effectively supported and scaled within the primary education sector.

Methodology

For the purposes of this research, a convenience sample of twenty-five teachers was used. A convenience sample is a type of non-random sampling used when the target population meet practical criteria such as such as easy access, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate in the study undertaken (Dornyei,2007). The selected teachers happened to be in the researchers' students on a Bachelor of Education course. They were students in an ICT integration module and as part of an online discussion, they had to discuss the opportunities of CPD teachers in primary education have been having for the implementation of remote and online learning. Therefore, the participants were not only easily accessible, but they also fit the purpose of the study; the teachers were recipients of CPD in the field of ICT integration. Convenience samples are likely to be biased (Leiner, 2014). Furthermore, in the context of this qualitative study, the subjectivity of the participants is valued.

There were two sources of data for this paper. Firstly, Online Discussion Forums (ODF) were used as a primary source of data. The discussions were generated by the participants as students in the ICT integration learning module. ODF provides a dynamic environment for interaction on a given topic. Indeed, the use of forums in online learning has been hailed as transformative pedagogy (Bailin & Battersby, 2017). ODF ensures that they is not a one-way transfer of knowledge from tutors to students in online learning. Indeed, it promotes sharing of knowledge among peers and tutors (Saghafian, & O'Neill, 2018). The other data source emanated from a Focus Group Interview carried out with the students after the ODF was closed. The purpose of this FGI was to clarify and dig deeper into replies on the ODF. Indeed, FGI are known to provide a safe platform for participants who have a lot to say and improves on the authenticity of the research being done as it gives more space to the voices of the teachers (Akyıldız, & Ahmed, 2021).

The ODF data was readily available on the e-learning platform. The discussions were used to understand the teachers' experiences, challenges, and expectations of CPD programs, focusing on their alignment with the evolving technological landscape. A text-reducing strategy, namely Thematic Analysis, was used to make sense of data. Text-reducing means that the complexity of discussions was aggregated into themes (Holz et al, 2012). The strategy used was to identify themes across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explain teachers' experiences. In this context, a deductive thematic analysis was used as the data set was coded into the UNESCO document "*Six Pillars for the Digital Transformation of Education*". Regarding the FGI, it was carried online via MS Teams. This method has high practical value for both the interviewer and the participants (Tümen Akyıldız, 2020). Indeed, neither had to move across long distances for the interview. The FGI was analysed using the same text-reducing, deductive thematic analysis approach mentioned above.

The study followed strict ethical guidelines. Firstly, there was informed consent of all participants. Since there is the possibility of some forum posts and opinions expressed in the FGI being potentially controversial, informed consent is crucial before using such data (Bond et al., 2013). Furthermore, the participants were reiterated the fact that both the online forum and the MS Teams space used for the FGI are private spaces. It is important to reassure participants that they were not being observed in a public setting (Zimmer, 2010). The researchers are also aware of their duty to properly manage and store the data, addressing issues of confidentiality (Smedley & Coulson, 2021). Lastly, ethically, the anonymity of the participants was guaranteed. All the names and other identifiable information such as school names and localities were removed from the data.

The researchers also ensure that the research was trustworthy as per the canons of qualitative research proposed by Guba & Lincoln (Alexander, 2019). Indeed, the choice of deductive thematic analysis enhanced the transferability of the study by providing a framework and procedure to understand Primary School Teachers' Perceptions on Continuous Professional Development for Digital Technology Integration in Teaching and Learning. The rich data also promotes transferability. Therefore, if other researchers used the same approach, generate data from similar participants and analyse it against the UNESCO document "*Six Pillars for the Digital Transformation of Education*", they are likely to get results reflecting the actual teachers' perceptions in their contexts.

Findings and discussions

This qualitative inquiry explored the lived experiences and professional development needs of primary school educators in Mauritius within the evolving landscape of digital transformation. Common themes were extracted from the responses, grouped by relevance to teacher professional development and digital transformation and analysed against the six pillars for the digital transformation of education. Below are the themes extracted and their alignment with the conceptual framework used for this study:

a. The need for technical and Digital Skills Training (Pillar 3 and 4- Digital competencies of teachers & Effective and Inclusive digital pedagogy)

Out of the 25 educators, 21 claimed that there is an urgent need for them to be trained with relevant technical skills to use digital platforms, online tools, and multimedia elements effectively. They supported their discussions with examples of the need to be knowledgeable and skillful in setting up virtual classrooms and using online tools like polls, padlets and webinars. Few educators even pointed out they should be able to address minor technical issues independently.

Extracts from discussion forum activity:

“To supplement conventional teaching methods, educators should receive training on how to include multimedia materials including audiobooks, films, interactive whiteboards, and quizzes. Additionally, rather than waiting for ministry specialists to investigate small technological concerns, educators should be trained to handle them themselves”- Teacher A

“In my opinion, educators must be able to create and curate digital content specific to the remote classroom. They should be able to easily create their own content”- Teacher B

Extracts from FGD:

“I would like to attend a workshop that introduced tools to create interactive assignments and quizzes as this will improve student participation and helped me assess understanding in real time. Moreover, the government must invest more money in technologies so that the country can become a knowledge-based economy.”- Teacher C

“The app NEARPOD helped me in the creation of lesson plans followed by activities (quizzes, worksheets, pool of questions, and other resources) that can be given to pupils. The interaction with my pupils while using tablets provided me with immediate response, in terms of evaluating pupils' work, thus getting a complete analysis of work given and providing immediate feedback to learners - in contrast to the load of work and time taken to correct pupils' copybooks”- Teacher D

These findings align with Pillar 3 and 4 of the Digital transformation of education which advocates the need for digital competencies of teachers and inclusive digital pedagogy for successful digital integration in Mauritian primary schools. Indeed, teachers' perceptions for having access to a good digital infrastructure resonates with Napitupulu at al. (2024) claims that technology and pedagogy are the core of CPDs for teachers. Moreover, effective CPD must include inclusive strategies that enable teachers to manage differentiated needs and ensure equity in remote learning environments.

b. Constant access to digital infrastructure (Pillar 1- Digital Infrastructure)

Teachers highlighted the importance of having consistent access to digital infrastructure, including devices, internet connectivity, and educational platforms. Several participants noted that while some infrastructure is present, its reliability is questionable. Moreover, many teachers lack the basic technical training required to troubleshoot minor issues independently.

Extract from Discussion Forum Activity:

“Teachers should be taught to deal with minor technical issues rather than waiting for technicians. There is a disconnection between the theoretical content and the practical challenges teachers face in their respective classrooms with mixed-ability and over-crowded classrooms;” – Teacher E

“I had no one at school to help me when the projector was not working or when the tablets didn’t work properly”-
Teacher F

These findings suggest that CPD should not only focus on digital pedagogy but also equip teachers with essential digital troubleshooting skills to reduce reliance on external support.

c. Learn through community of practice (Pillar 6: Education Innovation and Digital Transformation)

Educators strongly demonstrated enthusiasm for more innovative, collaborative, and teacher-led CPD models. They perceive that teachers should be encouraged to work as a community of practice whereby they could exchange ideas, reflect on challenges, and access continuous learning resources.

Extracts from FGD and Discussion Forum Activity:

“Teachers should be taught the way they are taught to teach—through collaboration and interaction.” – Teacher G

“Indeed, it is very important for us educators that we have the attitude of sharing knowledge; I strongly believe in peer teaching; it helps so much. the idea of sharing our works on a platform will help many of us to implement and make conduct remote and online classes effectively. over and above our students will be gaining much more” Teacher H

The findings suggest a shift from top-down training toward participatory and dynamic professional development, fostering innovation through peer learning and reflective practice. These findings confirm Bradshaw et al. (2012) and Petar (2024) arguments around using innovative bottom-up approach and promoting collaboration through coaching and mentoring as future orientations of CPD.

d. Curriculum-aligned digital content (Pillar 2- Digital Content and curriculum)

There was a strong emphasis on the need for curriculum-aligned digital content. Teachers expressed the necessity for updated resources and strategies that match the realities of online and blended learning in primary education.

Extract from Discussion Forum Activity:

“Educators need training in skills including effective communication and curriculum adaptation.” – Teacher I

Extract from Discussion Forum Activity:

“CPD should be more content- specific, practical, and supported by infrastructure, more follow-up and on- going support mechanisms”- Teacher J

The data reveal a gap between available digital tools and the pedagogical content that fits the national curriculum. Teachers called for CPD that bridges this gap through practical, localized resources.

e. Lack of continuity of CPD provision (Pillar 5- leadership, Policy and Governance)

Respondents claimed that professional development should be an ongoing process where they can refine their teaching practices. They pointed out that opportunities for CPD were too infrequent and poorly coordinated. They argued that there is no follow-up from school leaders and policy makers.

Extracts from the Discussion Forum Activity and the FGD:

“Training sessions should be quite regular and not once every three or four years.” – Teacher K

“There’s no proper planning or support from leadership.” – Teacher L

These reflections substantiate the need for policy-driven CPD initiatives which are sustained and well-communicate to the relevant stakeholders emphasizing on their alignment with the national education goals. They also confirm Flore and Govender (2021) arguments that training activities should be planned in series.

The findings highlights that Mauritian primary school educators are opened to embrace digital transformation while at the same time facing several challenges for effective CPD implementation. Improving digital infrastructure, addressing the digital skills and competencies gaps, and promoting a community of practice with full support of school leaders and policymakers are fundamental for successful digital technology integration to meet the evolving needs of education. There is need for CPD to be customised according to classroom realities to be able to align with the nation vision of transforming Mauritius into a knowledge economy.

Conclusion

In positioning teachers as key drivers of digital transformation in education, this research underscores an urgent need for sustained, contextually relevant CPDs that are aligned with the goals of the National Curriculum Framework. These CPDS should aim at equipping educators with relevant digital competencies and pedagogical mastery that matches the curriculum requirements. Moreover, consistent institutional support, appropriate digital infrastructure, and opportunities for collaborative learning are key elements for successful implementation of CPDs in Mauritius being classified as a Small Islands Developing State (SIDS). However, school leaders and policymakers should work collectively to meet the challenges of a digitally mediated future. This study contributes to body of knowledge on to how CPDS could be tailored to promote an equitable and quality education in the digital age. Advancing digital education in Mauritius will require CPD to be systematically integrated into educational policy and leadership practices, thereby positioning teachers as central agents in the transformation of teaching and learning processes.

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