

Okul Öncesi Eğitim Alanında Çalışan Erkek Öğretmenlerin Mesleki Motivasyonlarını Etkileyen Unsurlar Hakkında Bir Araştırma

An Exploratory Study on the Factors Which Influence Professional Motivation in Male Early Childhood Teachers

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Abstract

This exploratory study aims to investigate the factors which motivate men to enter and remain as teachers in early education field, and to encourage male involvement in early education by sharing the collective wisdom of experienced male teachers. The researchers also aim to inform childcare center directors and recruiters about the advantages of having males as teachers in order to bring real diversity and equality into the early childhood education. A descriptive case study method was employed in the study to gain in-depth understanding of the issue. Using purposive sampling seven male teachers were selected to participate in the study. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that prior experience with children, being parent, wanted to help children, relationship with the co-worker, and the workplace environment are the main categories that affected males to enter and stay in the profession.

Key words: Male teachers, early childhood education, professional motivation,

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı erkekleri okul öncesi eğitim alanında öğretmen olmaya ve bu meslekte tutmaya yardımcı olan etkenleri araştırmak bu öğretmenlerin tecrübelerini paylaşarak okul öncesi eğitimde erkek katılımını teşvik etmektir. Ayrıca, okul öncesi eğitim yöneticilerini erkek varlığının okul öncesi kurumlarda çeşitliliği ve eşitliği arttırdığına yönelik olarak bilgilendirmektir. Konu ile derinlemesine bilgi sahibi olmak için betimleyici vaka çalışması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışma için amaca dayalı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak yedi öğretmen seçilmiştir. Veriler yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniği ile toplanmıştır. Sonuçlara göre önceden çocuklarla olan tecrübe, ebeveyn olmak, çocuklara yardımcı olma isteği, iş arkadaşıyla olan ilişki, işyeri ortamı erkeklerin bu mesleğe girmesi ve kalması için etken olan kategoriler olarak ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erkek öğretmenler, okul öncesi eğitim, mesleki motivasyon

Introduction

Unfortunately, in today's media-oriented societies, the best male role-models are macho-looking, gun-carrying television personalities for the majority of the children. Society gives men a role as "breadwinners" and forces them to work outside, away from their homes, rather than sharing the responsibility in nurturing children. The general idea, women being better nurturers than men, has been challenged since early 1950's. Despite the changing view

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about the role of men in children's lives, however, there are still very few males working in early childhood/elementary education (less than 5%). The reluctance of men to enter the field at this level has been investigated thoroughly by numerous researchers over the last couple of decades. Nevertheless, there is very limited data from early childhood teachers, who are actively teaching, concerning their motivations which keep them in the profession despite the challenges they face frequently.

Literature shows that there are several factors that prevent men choosing early childhood education as a career path. Men are never encouraged by society to become an early childhood education teacher because of the common belief that unlike females, males are not capable of nurturing children (Cunningham and Watson, 2002; King, 1998; Robinson, 1981; Rodriguez, 1997). Murray (1996) reports that because of its "gendered" nature, child care profession "reproduces institutionalized gender inequity in the ways it positions women and men as workers" (p.382).

Another issue contributing the absence of males in early childhood education is the constant suspicion coming from parents and colleagues generally asserting the idea that the males working with young children must possess some sort of sexual anomaly and/or are more likely to abuse children (Barnard, Hovingh, and Nezwiek, 2000; Farquhar 1997; Rodriguez, 1997; Sanders, 2002; Sargent, 2001, 2002) . Despite the changing believes of society regarding males in childcare (Robinson, 1981), "constant, intense scrutiny" continue to influence "every aspect of men's teaching lives" (Sanders, 2002; p.23). Consequently, this issue also further contributes to the gender inequity in the workplace because male teachers are often treated differently than their female counterparts. Neugebauer (1994), for example, reports that in some childcare settings male teachers are not allowed to change children's diaper or be present with them alone in the bathroom. Sargent (2002) argues that to prevent further pressure from directors, parents and colleagues, most male teachers would develop alternative caregiving methods to replace traditional ways of showing affection to young children. In addition to that, males are strongly encouraged, almost pressured by the society to move administrative positions rather than being in the classroom with children (Barnard et al., 2000; Budig, 2002; Jensen, 1996; Sargent, 2001, 2002).

Perhaps the most important reason preventing men from entering and staying in early childhood education field is the low wages. Unfortunately, early childhood education continues to be one of the less paying occupations among all. Numerous scholars agree that the low social status of early childhood education is the number one reason for the low wages. Some researchers say low social status stems from a common misconception that

early childhood education requires minimal occupational skills and knowledge (Barnard et al., 2000). Looking at the issue from feminist angle, Murray (1996) claims that like all dominantly female occupations, the pay system in early childhood education field is constructed under the assumption that women's wage is to provide only supplementary support rather than being the primary source of income in a family. Farquhar (1997) points out the fact that "the older the child being cared for and taught, the higher the pay and social status" (p. 3). The debate about the low pay rates continues in many platforms and is a topic for a separate article itself. No matter what the reasons are behind the low wages in early childhood education, the consequences are profound. Many male teachers interviewed by different researchers reported that low salary is a very important factor in their decision to enter or stay in the profession (Cooney and Bittner, 2001; Robinson, 1988; Rodriguez, 1997). Clearly, the early childhood level teacher salary is not enough for many male teachers who, according to the common belief, should be the "breadwinner" of the family (Cooney and Bittner, 2001; Neugebauer, 1994; Murray, 1996). In fact, even though they were not questioned specifically on the topic, all of the participants in our study exhibited their concerns about the low wages issue. Two of the participants reported that the money would be the number one reason if they had decided to leave the profession. Another teacher told us he fixes cars and computers as a side job in order to be able to pay his bills.

Review of the current literature indicates that low pay, low social status and scrutiny are the main reasons why there are very few male teachers in the field of early childhood education. It can be, then, assumed that increasing wages, and educating society in terms of the advantages of having male teacher in early childhood settings may bring more men in to the profession and help retaining the ones already in the profession. However, the reasons why some men still choose teaching young children as a career path despite the current circumstances is still a mystery. At this point, literature provides very limited data since, there are very few studies out there focusing specifically to this issue.

Sanders (2002) points out that male student often feel obligated to defend their reasons to enter in the field of early childhood education to public but, she does not reveals what those reasons are.

In his survey study, Cook (1997) asks the following research question: "What factors are important in choosing to pursue career in elementary or early childhood education?" Nevertheless, he later fails to discuss his findings for this particular research question.

Drawing from the findings of numerous studies, Mullohand (2001) concludes that previous experience of working with young children is an important factor in men's decision

to enter the profession as teachers. Other researchers suggest attracting more males through volunteering activities, father involvement opportunities, and workshops (Cunningham, 1999; McBride and Rane, 1997).

Research shows that most male teachers believe the importance of male role model in children's lives. Rodriguez (1997), points out: "Men usually consider themselves a role model for their students, more so than their female colleagues" (p.4). Robinson (1998) emphasizes altruistic reasons like being a role model as main motives that influence males to enter this profession. These reasons seem well-matched with what Rodriguez (1997) found out in his study. 65 percent of the participants in Rodriguez' study reported that they love working with children and one fourth of the participants reported that they enjoy influencing today's youth. Mullohand (2001) also reports personal satisfaction and desire to contribute to society as two main reasons why men enter this profession. Some researchers argue that altruistic reasons to enter and remain in the profession are so strong they even neutralize the negative effect of low wages (Farquhar, 1997; Mullohand 2001).

Neugebauer (1994) briefly emphasizes the importance of working environment for male teachers. Pleasant working conditions, competitive wages/benefits and continuous support from directors, according to Neugebauer (1994), are main reasons why some men choose to stay in the profession rather than moving to other careers or positions.

Overview of available literature shows that altruistic reasons such as providing a healthy male role model for young children and desire to influence children's lives in a positive way plays an important role in men's decision to enter or stay in the profession. It can also be drawn from the literature that experience with children has a positive effect on men who wants to become an early childhood teacher. Finally, even though it is not directly related to the men in the profession, good working environment is crucial to attract and retain more teachers for early childhood education.

Thus, the main purpose of this research is to investigate the factors which motivate early childhood/elementary teachers to enter and remain in the profession. The factors identified throughout this study can be used to develop guidelines concerning the professional development of practicing teachers by sharing the collective wisdom of experienced teachers. Questions addressed in this study include: Why men chose to pursue a career in early childhood education? What factors have an effect on men's career decision as an early childhood teacher? and What factors have influence on male teachers to remain or leave the profession?

Method

In order to investigate male involvement in early childhood settings, a descriptive case study design was employed in this research. According to Merriam (2001), “a case study design is employed to gain in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (p.19). In this context, we tried to find out and its underlying reasons of the motivations of male early childhood teachers to enter the teaching job and stay in the profession.

Setting and Participants

The study was carried out in a mid-size city in the mid-west region. A large public university was situated in the heart of the city and was the main economic contributor to the city and the surrounding. There are 12 public elementary schools and 13 private elementary schools where 15000 children were enrolled.

According to Merriam (2001, p. 61) “to solve qualitative problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences, the most appropriate sampling strategy is non-probabilistic-the most common form of which is called purposeful”. For the current study, we selected seven participants working in the field of early childhood education settings in the area using purposive sampling. The participants were ranged in age from 22 to 52 with an average age of 37. Combined experience of these teachers is 44 years. All but one of the participants were actively teaching at preschool and kindergarten levels at the time they were interviewed. One participant was a program coordinator and not actively teaching. He was interviewed about his past teaching experience. Table 1 briefly lists the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1

Participants in the Study

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Teaching Position	Degree	Teaching experience
Tim B.	49	Preschool	Ph.D.	9
Tim D.	52	Program Coordinator	Master's	7
Dave	37	2 year-old Classroom	B.A.	7
Jeff	30	Kindergarten	CDA*	5
Randy	38	Preschool	CDA*	2
Zach	22	Preschool	CDA*	4
Jeremy	31	Preschool	Master's	10

*CDA: Child development associate

Procedures and Data Analysis

Qualitative semi-structured interviewing technique was employed as a data collection method. This form of data collection offers maximum flexibility especially when researchers are focusing on the specific experience and/or perception of the participants (Carspecken, 1996; Crano and Brewer 2002; Sarantakos, 2005).

Based on the literature reviews, researchers prepared nine primary questions which were asked in terms of probing for the answers to the research question. Then these questions were reviewed by two colleague who were lecturing classes in an early childhood education program in a university. Based on their opinions, in order to clarify understanding of the questions, wording in some questions were changed. Some of the questions were: How did you become an early childhood teacher, tell us about your thought process, in a one to ten scale how satisfied are you with your job, why, and where do you see yourself in the next five years in terms of professional development. Researchers contacted with the participants via e-mail and phone. Appropriate time and places were determined by teachers then researchers met with teachers to conduct the interviews. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to sign informed consent forms and briefed about the goals of the study. In addition, participants were asked to give more detail and/or explanation whenever the situation warranted. Each of these interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and all interviews were recorded then transcribed.

In analyzing the data, we used inductive data analysis strategies including open-coding techniques and memo writing. First of all, the transcriptions of the data collected through interviews were extensively and repetitively read. We prepared a summary of the most important aspects to each interview question. Then, we underlined words, phrases, and sentences and wrote the codes in the margin. Later, we generated basic themes and categories by constantly looking for similarities and parallels in the data. These categories helped us understand the participant's ideas, practices about their job, and their job motivation. In addition to this, we looked for logical groupings and links among the categories. The categories and themes emerging from the participant's interview data were conceptualized as a whole.

In terms of checking the accuracy or the validity of the findings, the researchers followed two out of eight procedural perspectives which Creswell (2003) suggests for

qualitative studies. These procedures were: member checks and peer debriefing. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) member checking or informant feedback or respondent validation is a vital procedure to establish validity for a qualitative study. In the present study, during the member checking process, the researchers' interpretations and the findings were sent to all of the participants via e-mail and asked their opinions. According to their comments and directions the necessary corrections or reductions were carried out on the final report.

Another way of checking the accuracy of the finding is peer debriefing. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) in peer debriefing stage, the present interpretation and the findings are shared with some experts who are not involved in the study. In this case, one person who was holding a Ph.D. degree in early childhood education helped with the debriefing process. During the process, the researchers shared the background information, the rationale, the methodology and the findings of the study with the peer. In the following part, we are going to present our findings.

Findings

Despite the differences in participants' backgrounds and level of experience, similar responses to the interview questions were given. Several themes emerged under the two main topics, entering the profession and working environment. Under these two main topics, closely related with our research questions , five sub-categories surfaced from the data analysis.

Entering the Profession

Prior experience with children

Five out of seven participants in our study reported that they had a direct experience and spent time with children prior to making their career decision. The other two participants, however, did not have a direct prior experience with children.

Tim D's career pathway was influenced and then changed dramatically after his first contact with children in his college years.

My undergraduate degree is in psychology and it's also the way I got into the field, taking a research class my junior year in college in the psychology department we were doing research at the local Head Start program and when that research ended I continued to volunteer at the Head Start program the rest of my junior year and all of my senior year. So that was really my first

experience in working in a program for early childhood education.... it became apparent to me fairly early when I was working at Head Start that I was good at working with kids. So that's really how I ended up doing this, nothing planned but I just kind of ended up doing it because I was good at it.

Jeremy's decision making process was much straighter in terms of entering the early childhood education field. He stated that:

I had four siblings; I always was in charge of watching them and taking care of them. About some point of my high school I realized that I was much happier with children than being with adults. Because children told you what they thought. They were open the new things, were not closed up and I was excited about them.

Dave, on the other hand, did not have any prior experience with children but had a strong motivation for being a teacher.

I was very sociable and a social kid. I liked to talk and play and once I got into public schooling, actually I went to Catholic school and they're very strict. That didn't work well for me because I wanted to talk and they wanted me to work, work, work, work, work. So I learned how to get my work done and it was boring, it wasn't stimulating. I got it done so I could talk. Well that would get me in trouble, which made me hate school more. So I could do the work. I would get straight A's but I would also get in trouble a lot and that continued to happen. I didn't get into huge trouble because I respected my parents enough not to become a troublemaker but I learned to hate school, which is one of the reasons I got into teaching is I felt I could do this better than most of my teachers.

The results showed that experience of enjoying working with children could be a positive encouragement to enter the profession (Mullohand, 2001). However, not all participants had prior experience with children although they had strong motivation points, such as being a role model for children.

Being a parent

Six out of seven participants have children and majority of them reported that being a parent influenced their career decision at some level. When we asked: "How did you become an early childhood teacher?" some of the participants strongly stated that being a parent was a positive incentive to enter the teaching profession. Tim B told us:

“I remember hearing some reports on the whole language on NPR, the All things Considered program driving in the car and having a young child thinking about stuff and having him in day care and child care, got me thinking about teaching.”

Again when we asked him what advice he would give to men who want to enter early childhood education field? He responded:

“Being a parent has really helped me, being a parent of a child.”

Being parent has a deeper meaning for Dave in terms of teaching children.

I’m sure it’ll come up, that question why I even do it but I have always known that I wanted to be a father and I have 2 girls of my own and that’s the best job I think I have. I don’t get paid for that. I don’t get paid much for watching other kids or babies either. So I see myself as being a father to all children, cosmically, spiritually.

This finding indicates that being a parent is an important indicator for men in terms of working with children. All but one of the participants had their own children; the only one without his own child was a foster parent. They were known as good fathers among their colleagues. The connection between being parent and being a male teacher in early childhood field has a close connection and needs to be explored further.

Wanted to help children by influencing their lives

Our findings indicate that the desire to be being a good role model for children is one of the important factors that motivate men to enter the field of early childhood education. When our participants were talking about how they had become an early childhood teacher, Dave stated that

I wanted to help people and I thought the best way to help was maybe to start at the beginning of a person’s life and try to give them as many positive experiences as possible so when they became adults maybe they’d have a better chance of being a nicer person. Because out there in the world there’s nice people out there but there are a lot of badness and a lot of evil people and there’s a lot of negative people. I wanted to try to change that. The best way to start is with kids... And it’s proven by parents of kids I taught 6 or 7 years ago who still say, “Oh, my kids still talk about you.” Or, “You’re still their favorite teacher” kind of stuff. Does that take the place of \$50,000? Some days yes, some days no. So it’s an interesting dance. I think keeping in mind you are really making the difference here. I do not want to be away from the

classroom, I want to be active in the class, being able to on the front lines making difference itself is the most rewarding part of being a teacher. I want to be part of this.

Tim B. also had a strong determination of teaching children and having an influence on them although he has a Ph.D. degree which may put him into different career path.

I just feel like we pressure kids too much and that we push them and we try to mold them and we keep them quiet and sit them down and feed them knowledge and I don't like that model. I'd rather have the kids learning by doing things and exploring and researching and choosing their own topics. I don't know, I'm way out of the mainstream. I don't think I belonged in the schools, especially in this county. I've just come to acknowledge that I don't belong there so it wouldn't be good for me or for them. That's probably why I'm in early childhood. But I enjoy working with little kids too. That's why I went toward elementary. It would have been natural as a Ph.D. researcher and stuff, would have been more natural to work and get a secondary degree and teach biology in high school and everybody said, "Why aren't you doing this? Why don't you want to get the training to be a principal?" I don't want to be a principal. I don't want to be a manager. I want to be hands on. I want to be in the classroom. And so I did want to work with younger children and I was attracted even in elementary to working with younger children.

Jeff, also, thinks that as taking a part in children lives is very important.

"I loved the fact that those children were like sponges. They wanted to learn everything, they wanted to ask everything. When you taught them they'll be able to answer, their responses like wow! I want to ask more questions and learn. I felt like this is maybe age group I want to work with... I like the fact that they learn so much; teacher plays a big part of in their future along their enjoyment of school. You have big role to mentor and guide a successful future.

Tim D., on the other hand, explained how enjoyment and rewarding part of teaching comes when you were recognized by parents as a successful teacher.

That's the reason people do work in this field basically because the reinforcement really comes from the kids and the parents. I'll have parents come up to me in the street that I've known their kids for years and they'll come up and say what a great experience it was being at Campus Children's

Center. That happens to me all the time. I'll be in the grocery store, and people will come up and I haven't seen them for years, and find out how old their kids are and how well they're doing.

We found that influencing children's lives positively is the most important motivation source of our participants similar to some studies in literature (Rodriguez, 1997; Robinson, 1998). Also, this altruistic reason is one of the main points that early childhood male teachers stay in their fields despite the fact that low wage and some other negative conditions (Farquhar, 1997).

Staying at the Profession

Our study revealed that working environment has a significant effect on male teachers and relationship with co-teachers and workplace conditions, especially, emerged as the most important ones.

Relationship with co-teacher

Being comfortable with co-worker is one of the essences of productive working environment. This becomes more important, especially when children's education is an issue. Agreements or disagreements between co-workers on the issues related to teaching philosophy may cause problems for children in the classroom. The importance of agreement between co-workers is stated by Tim B.

I get along very well with my teaching partner. We really I think agree very much in how to treat the children in sort of a compassionate approach that's not real punitive

On the other hand, Randy implied that disagreement with his colleagues in workplace makes him uncomfortable and unproductive although his relationship with his co-teacher is very well.

I didn't choose where I'm at. It just had to be this way. I wouldn't choose it. I would rather be somewhere else but find support groups if you need it. There are groups out there, it is menteach.com or .org. But I don't feel, I wouldn't start one of those groups because it doesn't bother me to be, maybe it's because I've worked with my best friend, Lee, and we get to see each other and go on our breaks together and vent about women who are driving us crazy at work. But it's hard. I kind of rambled on about that one. But like with Brandon, I tried to show him that you can come to work and be in your room and do a great job and love it working with the kids but unfortunately all the stuff outside, getting to the room where you see colleagues that don't

necessarily get along with, that are as bad, children being as pure and innocent and good, even when they're screaming their heads off.

This result shows that, relationship with colleagues is very important to keep male early childhood teachers in the profession. Because of the low status of the job, the male teachers already feel a pressure on them and these kinds of relationship based problems make them more uncomfortable.

Workplace

Physical and procedural aspects of the working environment are another motivation factor for male teachers.

Tim D. states that benefits of the institution where he works is one of the most important motivation factor or him to stay in the there

But working for the university is a pretty good gig. I don't get paid as much as I think I should but I get paid as much as I would with a job up there and the benefits at IU, the fee courtesy alone, to be able to send my kids to, my oldest daughter here and pay half tuition is a benefit. IU has a wonderful retirement program, better than any other state retirement program. So there are a lot of reasons to stay here for me

Similarly, Tim B. states that flexibility of his work place policies makes him happy in his job.

Something about Harmony School, a few things about Harmony School, is in early childhood I am paid the same as the other teachers through 12th grade, same scale. I have the same working hours as the other teachers all the way up to 12th grade, pretty much. It's going to be different. I get the same vacations and so I'm able to survive financially and survive mentally. I'm able to have a family and have time for my family where the model at the BDLC there all the teachers are stressed out. They weren't getting enough money to pay their rent or to pay to keep their car running. They certainly couldn't think about raising a family. I worked with a man who had done it for like 7 years and he was wanting to get married and raise a family and he just couldn't see how he could possibly do it and so he changed careers. He went to the newspapers, no, he went to sales, selling something, I don't know what. They're working long hours, 8 hours a day and then they're doing prep outside of that and they have a lunch hour, a lunch half hour but that is usually they lose that and eat with the kids because there's some crisis or another. I just didn't think that was tenable for me because I wanted to spend time with

my kid and I want some vacation. That's another thing. You're supposed to be grateful for getting a week off at Christmas and here I get spring break and I get Christmas, I get summer, so those are all very good...Compared to most early childhood programs sometimes something will break into my lunch hour, pretty much I have a lunch hour and I can actually run and do an errand or I can just relax and read the paper and that's pretty shocking in my experience and knowledge of early childhood.

Zach also, points out that the benefits of the institution motivate him to stay in the field although he stressed that low pay is key issue for him.

If I could do what I do and get paid well or even better than what I'm getting paid now and Indiana University provides really good benefits and retirement package. So it's almost attractive enough.

These findings comply with previous research in the literature that working environments have a significant effect on male teachers (Neugebauer, 1994). Pleasant working conditions, such as holidays, breaks, lunch time, etc., and support from colleagues are the key factors that motivate early childhood male teachers.

Discussion

The findings of this study support the findings of the previous studies. Reports from out participants indicate that the experience with children prior to making their career decision is a very important factor. Experience of enjoying working with children could be a positive encouragement to enter the profession. Therefore, we believe, more males can be attracted to enter the profession through volunteering activities, father involvement opportunities, and workshops. Neugebauer (1994) reports some successful results for such involvement program. A child care center in Neugebauer's study "had been able to recruit at least one male teacher for each classroom" through a father involvement program (p.10). McBride and Rane (1997) suggest creating a friendly environment for fathers/males in early childhood settings where males can feel accepted. Cunningham (1998) emphasizes the importance of recruiting volunteers amongst men who attend universities in terms of familiarizing them to the idea of choosing early childhood education as a career.

Our findings also revealed that parenthood is another important factor in male early childhood teachers' career decisions. Six out of seven participants in our study have children and majority of them reported that being a parent influenced their career decision at some level. Fathers are also more likely to expose to the early childhood culture than single males

since they involve with their children's schools. Our responsibility as early childhood educators, then, to emphasize the positive effects of working in the field of early childhood education on one's own parenting skills. There is a need for further investigation on this topic in order to see how male teachers, who are also parents, reflect their professional life to their parenthood.

Another important factor which affects male teachers in terms of both entering and staying in the profession is their altruistic feelings about young children. Our findings indicate that the desire to be being a good role model for children is one of the important factors that motivate men to enter the field of early childhood education. Participants of this study reported that the rewarding experience of being able to positively influence children's lives one of the most important factors that keep them in the profession.

Finally, we found out that working environment has a significant effect on male teachers particularly in terms of staying in the profession. Factors like salaries, relationship with colleagues, support from parents and policies, and conditions in the workplace may dramatically affect their plans for continuation of teaching. We believe this area needs further exploration with a larger sample size to insure

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