

## **The Perceptions of Turkish Children Living in Germany Towards Turkish, Learning and Using Turkish<sup>1</sup>**

### **Almanya'da Yaşayan Türk Çocuklarının Türkçeye, Türkçeyi Öğrenmelerine ve Kullanmalarına İlişkin Görüşleri**

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**Makale Geliş Tarihi: 20.05.2016**

**Yayına Kabul Tarihi: 31.05.2017**

#### **Abstract**

*The aim of this research was to explore the perceptions of the Turkish children living in Germany towards Turkish, learning and using Turkish. Qualitative method was used to describe the children's opinions for in depth study. The research was conducted via purposeful sampling method and the population of the study consisted of total 31 students. The data were collected via semi-structured interviews and content analysis was carried out.*

*The results of the study revealed that most of the students who participated in the study spoke German or mostly German and half-German half-Turkish in non-school settings and in the school except for the course hours, they read more books written in German in addition to their course books and they watched Turkish television channels a lot. Furthermore, it was found that nearly all the children liked Turkish courses and they liked reading course books written in Turkish, and more than half of them considered that it was necessary to learn Turkish, more than half of them found Turkish easy to learn, and half of them thought that they knew Turkish well.*

**Keywords:** *Bilingualism; native language, Turkish children in Germany*

#### **Özet**

*Bu araştırmada, Almanya'da yaşayan Türk çocuklarının Türkçeye, Türkçeyi öğrenmelerine ve kullanmalarına ilişkin görüşleri belirlenmeye çalışılmış; çocukların görüşlerini derinlemesine betimlemek amacıyla nitel yöntem kullanılmıştır. Araştırma, 31 öğrenciden oluşan çalışma grubu üzerinde yürütülmüştür. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yoluyla toplanmış, içerik analizi yapılmıştır.*

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<sup>1</sup> 4. Cyprus International Conference on Educational Research kongresinde sözlü bildiri olarak sunulmuştur.

*Çalışmanın sonucunda, araştırmaya katılan çocukların çoğunun okul dışında ve okulda ders saatleri dışında Almanca ya da daha çok Almanca olmak üzere Almanca-Türkçe karışık konuştuğu, ders kitaplarının dışında daha çok Almanca kitaplar okuduğu, daha çok Türk televizyon kanallarını izlediği; çocukların tamamına yakınının Türkçe derslerini sevdiği, Türkçe ders kitaplarını severek okuduğu; yarısından çoğunun Türkçeyi öğrenmeyi gerekli bulduğu; yarısından çoğunun Türkçe öğrenmeyi kolay bulduğu; yarısının Türkçeyi iyi bildiğini düşündüğü saptanmıştır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* İki dillilik, ana dili, Almanya'daki Türk çocukları.

## 1. Introduction

Regarding the migrations to notably Germany and many European countries to work in 1960s, using both the native language and the official language of their country of residence (bilingualism) affected the acculturation and socialization process of the Turks in many ways. The native language of the Turkish children and the official language of their country of residence are different from each other. This process has brought into question the importance of the process of acquiring and learning the native language which is an important part and carrier of the culture for the healthy development of Turkish children who experience bilingualism in a bicultural environment regarding their own culture. However, individuals whose cultural identities develop healthfully do not have any problems about understanding and respecting other cultures and they can live in different cultural environments in harmony and with confidence (Yaylacı, 2008). These children have to acquire their native language Turkish until they are six years old without interruption so that their identity, feelings, ideas, and concepts can be developed healthfully. On the other hand, they have to learn German as an education language. Their living space seems to be bilingual and bicultural; however, although they are at the age of 6, they are not able to learn the language and develop the thinking levels both in Turkish and German which monolingual children acquire due to the factors related to language acquisition processes such as the age they encounter these languages, being eligible for using them, and exposure time. In addition to these disadvantages, there are other disadvantages resulting from socio-political approaches, teaching programs, teachers and course books due to learning process of German and Turkish in schools. On the other hand, it is known that there is a close relationship between the native language, education language and school performance of the children who grow up in bilingual and bicultural environments (Çalışkan, 2008; Belet, 2009; Yazıcı, 2011; Yazıcı & Temel, 2011; Aydın, 2013; Yağmur, 2013).

It was stated in the World Bank's so-called report "Education for All" (2005) that teaching of the mother tongue / home language instruction has created sustainable effects such as promoting participation in learning environments, creating a relative equality in education in multicultural societies, gaining much better and higher learning outcomes, reducing grade retention or grade repetition, reducing students' rate of dropping out of the education system, generating socio-cultural benefits for multicultural societies and individuals and reducing the cost of education (Belet, 2009). Moreover, the 1977 guideline of the Council of European Communities on education for immigrant minority children (dated 27 July, 1977) has promoted the legitimizati-

on of immigrant minority language instruction. This Directive , which has still been in force since then, states, “Member States shall, in accordance with their national circumstances and legal systems, and in cooperation with States of origin, take appropriate measures to promote, in coordination with normal education , teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin for the children”. However, there have still been many continuous inconsistencies regarding mother tongue instruction for minority groups (Yağmur, 2006).

### **Aim Of The Study**

Considering all these mentioned above, the quality of teaching-learning process of bilingual Turkish children related to Turkish becomes quite important. Monitoring teaching-learning Turkish processes regularly regarding students, parents, teachers, directors, countries’ policies, etc., and developing them based on the findings will make contributions to promote the quality of the process. This study aimed at exploring the opinions of students studying in two elementary schools located in Gelsenkirchen and Duisburg in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany about learning Turkish.

### **Problem Of The Study**

What are the opinions of Turkish children living in Germany about Turkish, learning and using Turkish?

### **Sub-Problems**

- What are the opinions of Turkish children living in Germany about using Turkish in their daily life?
- What are the opinions of Turkish children living in Germany about learning Turkish?
- What are the opinions of Turkish children living in Germany about Turkish?

## **2. Method**

Qualitative method was used in this research study to investigate perceptions and phenomenon in natural settings in a real and holistic way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2000: 19).

In this research, purposeful sampling was preferred as a non-probability sampling method (Aypay, Cemaloğlu, Sarpkaya, Ellez, Şahin, Tombul, et al., 2009: 124-125) and the population of the study consisted of total 31 Turkish students studying in two elementary schools located in Gelsenkirchen and Duisburg in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany.

The opinions of the participants in the study group about the statement of the problem were gathered via interviews and they were described. Survey method was used as one of the descriptive methods (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel; 2008: 15-19). The opinions of the three experts in the field were taken while designing the interview forms and the form was finalized after it was administered to two identical children with the participants in the study group. The interviews lasted 20 minutes on

average for each participant and the responses were recorded with a recorder. After the questions were answered with basic responses such as “Turkish”, “German”, “Mixed”, “Easy” and etc., the responses about the reasons were not limited to only one statement so the participants were expected to talk until they stated their reasons.

The data obtained via semi-structured interviews were analyzed via content analysis and they were coded thematically considering the concepts obtained from the data. In addition, the themes were elicited and the data set was converted into numeric format with the intention of increasing reliability, reducing bias and making comparisons between the themes. Moreover, the themes were presented in tables via word-concept frequency and percentages (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2000: 156-158, 162-183). During the analysis, each different view stated by the participants was considered as an item. Because some participants could not answer some fundamental questions and/or state their reasons, the frequencies ,but not the number of the participants while calculating the percentages ,were taken,. Furthermore while interpreting the findings, participants’ responses to the question “Why?” were quoted.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3. 1. The opinions of Turkish children living in Germany about using Turkish in their daily life

**Table 1. The data related to which languages Turkish children prefer to speak with their friends in non-school settings and why.**

1) Do you speak Turkish or German with your friends in non-school settings? Why?	
Turkish. (7)	Because they like Turkish more. (2) Because they can speak Turkish better. (2) Because his friends are Turkish. (1)
Mixed but mostly Turkish (4)	Because they have more Turkish friends. (2) Because they are good at Turkish. (3)
Mixed but mostly German (5)	Because they can speak German better(2) Because they have got Germans among their friends . (2)
German (15)	Because he is not good at speaking Turkish. (1) Because they are used to speaking German more. (2) Because most of their friends speak German. (2) Because they speak German although their friends are Turkish (4) Because their friends are mostly German (7)
31	30

Regarding the question which language they used in non-school settings, out of 31 Turkish children in the study group, 15 of them said German, 7 Turkish, 4 mixed but mostly Turkish and 5 of them said mixed but mostly German. The percentages ( $f= 20$ ; 64%) of those who stated that they spoke German or mixed but mostly German were higher than the percentages ( $f= 11$ ; 35%) of those who said that they spoke Turkish or mixed but mostly Turkish. Because children spend most of their time, except for their sleeping time, in German schools where speaking Turkish is mostly forbidden

and they use German with its four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) for a long time. It is considered that this case is also true for their choice of language they use among their friends due to being a habit. One of the children’s statement supports this opinion:” All my friends are Turkish, but because we go to a German school, we are used to speaking German more”. According to a study conducted by Akıncı (Yaylacı, 2008), Turkish children in France prefer to speak French with their peers rather than Turkish. Belet (2009) implies that teachers state that one of the reasons why Turkish children in Norway do not know Turkish well is that they are not able to use Turkish. 9 children (29%) state that they use both languages, Turkish or German although one of them outweighs. One of the main reasons for this situation is that they know one of these languages better than the other (f= 5; 55%). It can be suggested that these children could learn neither Turkish nor German accurately. The results of the interviews carried out by Alabay (2008) with the families of Turkish children in Germany also support this view. The children use the language they can speak better or they switch between both languages intensively in the lessons, during the breaks, in the streets or at home when they are not obliged to use them under such circumstances (their teachers force them to speak German, their friends are either Turkish or German, their family members can speak neither Turkish nor German). It is found that the reasons why children prefer the language they use can be listed in terms of frequencies, respectively: friends (f= 18; 60%), knowing the language better (f= 10; 33%) and loving the language (f= 2; 6%). It can be implied that children prefer to use the language which their friends speak.

**Table 2. The data related to which languages Turkish children prefer to speak with their friends out of course hours in the school and why.**

2) Do you mostly speak Turkish or German with your friends out of course hours in the school-during the breaks? Why?	
Turkish. (10)	Because they like Turkish very much. (3) Because they play with their Turkish friends during the break time. (4)
Mixed (1)	Because he knows neither of them. (1)
Mixed but mostly German. (4)	
	Because his friends are Turkish but they speak German. (1) Because they do not know Turkish well. (2) Because there are Germans in their circle of friends. (2) Because they have got more German friends. (4) Because their friends speak German. (4) Because their German teachers forbade them to speak Turkish.(7)
German. (16)	
31	28

The children were asked which language they spoke out of course hours in the school and 10 children (32%) said Turkish and 16 of them (51%) responded as German. The number of children who stated that they spoke German in the school (16) and the number of children who said that they spoke German out of school are almost the same; however, it is revealed that the number of children who stated that they spoke Turkish in the school (10) was higher than those who said that they spoke Turkish out of school (7). As stated by the children (“The German children annoy us by

saying that we speak German badly”, “While we are playing with our friends in out of school settings, we speak German with them as we are much used to it but in the school during the breaks we speak Turkish, but I really do not know the reasons”), they were not able to speak German as well as their German friends and this may have created negative situations for them such as lack of confidence and having anxiety for being teased and so on. The reasons why the children spoke German out of course hours in the school were that their friends (55%) and German teachers forbade them to speak Turkish (35%).

**Table 3. The data related to in what languages Turkish children prefer to read books except for the course books and why.**

3) Do you read books written in German or Turkish except for the course books? Why?	
Turkish. (9)	Because he likes Turkish stories more. (1) Because he already knows German and he wants to learn German . (1) Because they understand what they read in Turkish better . (6)
German. (21)	Because he wants to improve his German. (1) Because books are always / mostly written in German. (7) Because they understand what they read in German better . (11)
30	27

Considering the question which asked in what languages they read books except for the course books, 9 children (%30) said that they read books in Turkish while 21 of them (%70) read in German. It is viewed that 17 (62%) of them could understand what they read in that language better and 7 (25%) of them said that there were books written only in that language. Çalışkan (2008) stated in her study that there were not enough books written in Turkish and appropriate to the levels of Turkish children living in Belgium at their homes and reading books in Flemish was much easier for nearly all of the children than reading books in Turkish. According to Belet (2009), less than half of the Turkish students living in Norway read books written in Turkish. It is quite challenging that children cannot find Turkish books in the environments where they can reach them; however, this problem can be solved much easily in the schools. Because of understanding what you read better in that language, it is found that 6 children (35%) read books in Turkish and 11 of them (64%) read books written in German. Based on this finding, it can be stated that two-thirds of the children are better at German in terms of reading comprehension. During the natural process of language acquisition, children first learn Turkish within the family via speaking and listening randomly and having intense experiences when compared to German but they learn German through reading and writing at school as it is planned. Thus, it can be thought that they prefer German when it comes to reading.

**Table 4. The data related to in what languages Turkish children prefer to watch television channels and why.**

4) Do you mostly watch Turkish TV channels or German TV channels? Why?	
Turkish channels (20)	Because he understands Turkish better. (1) Because she can learn what she does not know from these channels. (1) Because he is curious about what is going on in Turkey. (1) Because a mother, brother, and etc., watch programs on Turkish channels. (2) Because there are programs which they like on Turkish channels. (15)
German channels. (11)	Because there are lack of children's programs on Turkish channels. (2) Because there are programs which they like on German channels. (3) Because they do not understand Turkish very well. (6)
31	31

Regarding the question which asked the TV channels they watch, 20 children (64%) said that they watched Turkish TV channels whereas 11 of them (35%) said German channels. In the research studies conducted by Akıncı (Yaylacı, 2008) and Çalışkan (2008), it was revealed that Turkish TV channels had a positive effect on Turkish immigrant children while learning their native language. 20 children (64%) stated that the reason for their choice of station was the programs they liked. It is clearly observed that the programs which attract the attention of children are effective for their choice of TV channels. 6 (54%) of the children said that they watched German stations and their reason was that they could not understand Turkish. It can make us think that during the production of children's programs on Turkish TV channels, bilingual Turkish children's proficiency and development levels in Turkish are considered.

### 3. 2. The opinions of Turkish children living in Germany about learning Turkish

**Table 5. The data related to whether Turkish children like Turkish courses or not and their reasons.**

1) Do you like Turkish courses? Why?	
Yes. (27)	Because they understand what they read. (2) Because it is fun. (2) Because teachers would rather have students play in the school ground than do activities. (1) Because he can play with his Turkish friends. (1) Because she learns information about the Turks and Turkey. (1) Because they explain what they do not understand in German courses in Turkish courses. (1) Because teachers do not get annoyed. (2) Because they like Turkish. (2) Because they are not obliged to speak German. (3) Because they learn Turkish. (4) Because they like tests, activities, and worksheets and etc. (4) Because they can do the activities easily. (5)
A little . (1)	Because the tests are difficult, he is afraid of getting a low grade. (1)
No. (1)	Because the classroom is too noisy. (1)
Do not take Turkish courses. (2)	
29	30

27 children (93%) stated that they liked Turkish courses. The reasons why Turkish students liked Turkish courses are that they understood the activities, liked them and

did them ( $f= 11$ ; 39%), they liked and learned Turkish ( $f= 6$ ; 21%), they played games and had fun ( $f= 4$ ; 14%), and they were not obliged to speak German ( $f= 3$ ; 10%). Based on these findings, it is considered that because the activities in Turkish courses were interesting and appropriate to the students' levels, they understood and participated in these courses willingly and actively. Moreover, the children felt themselves comfortable because they could play games with their Turkish friends and they liked Turkish courses. On the other hand, such expressions as "teachers would rather have us play in the school ground than do activities.", "The activities are too easy, why don't we do more activities which are more difficult?", "The teacher does not assign a lot of homework, so I can study my Turkish course at home and I can do more revision, " I wish the teacher were better and could teach much more easily.", "When my teacher changed, I got confused" can make us consider that the quality of Turkish courses must be examined with regard to the programs, learning-teaching processes, assessment and evaluation, course materials and tools, and teachers. According to Yağmur (2013), among the reasons stated for the inadequate Turkish education given to the Turkish immigrant children, the most important one is that Turkish is taught by Turkish teachers specialised in teaching native language with native language curricula and course books instead of expert Turkish teachers in this field. In a research study carried out about the cases of Switzerland, England, and Belgium by Can (2008) it is determined that Turkish teachers in these countries have problems about finding resources which include appropriate teaching techniques and will promote unity in teaching.

The reason why children refrain from speaking German may have resulted from the fact that they did not know and use German at a desired level in the classroom environment. Such statements as "The German teachers get annoyed and shout at us when there is a noise in the classroom and when we talk among ourselves.", "The teachers in Turkish courses are not angry.", " Our Turkish teacher does not say bad words at us, she is not angry with us, she is so polite and good.", "She says, "You are good". "Well done.", "She loves me", "We have a lot of fun with our teacher in Turkish courses", "Our Turkish teacher helps me to learn and understand what I do not know, she teaches very well.", "She cares about us and she is not unfair to us." may also indicate that in addition to learning difficulties, children have emotional problems in German schools resulting from the strict teachers who do not understand them. According to Güllüpınar (2010), teachers in German schools must be trained and qualified to manage heterogeneous classes in terms of cultural, language and social aspects.

**Table 6. The data related to whether Turkish children like course books in Turkish or not and their reasons.**

2) Do you really like reading course books in Turkish? Why?	
Yes (24)	Because these books consist of subjects related to the Turks and Turkey like Atatürk, national holidays, and wars. (6)
	Because there are fairy tales, short stories, poems, and etc. (5)
	Because there are pictures. (4)
	Because there are fun activities. (3)
	Because they can do activities in these books . (3)
	Because he can understand what he reads in these books. (1)



2) Do you really like reading course books in Turkish? Why?	
Yes, but... (3)	Because the teacher does not have them do these activities in the books, he does not read them a lot. (1) Because he does not understand some texts. (1) Because they are written with too-small fonts, he cannot read some parts. (1)
A little . (1)	Because he likes to read texts which draw his attention (1)
28	26

24 children (85%) said that they liked to read course books in Turkish. They stated the following reasons: 6 (25%) children said that there were subjects about Turkey and the Turks, 5 (25%) of them said that there were fairy tales, short stories, and poems, 4 (16%) children stated that there were pictures and 3 (12%) of them mentioned the presence of fun activities and 3 (12%) children mentioned the activities which they could do in the book. The findings reveal that genres such as fairy tales, stories, and poems, visuals like pictures, and fun activities which can be done in the books are considered as the factors which cause children to gain benefit from the course books. It is found that subjects related to the Turks and Turkey such as Atatürk, national holidays, wars and national history and culture attract the attention of Turkish children.

### 3. 3. The opinions of Turkish children living in Germany about Turkish

**Table 7. The data related to whether Turkish children find learning Turkish difficult or easy and their reasons**

1) In your opinion, is it difficult or easy to learn Turkish? Why?	
Easy. (15)	Because Turkish is my native language. (1) Because their mothers have spoken Turkish with them at home since their childhood. (2) Because her parents speak Turkish at home. (1) Because he reads books written in Turkish. (1) Because the Turkish teacher can help them when they have difficulties (1)
Quite difficult. (8)	Because they speak German more than Turkish at home (1) Because it is difficult to read and write in German due to different letters in German. (1) Because I do not understand some words. (1) Because some words are difficult to read . (2) Because new things are taught, I forget the others.. (1)
Difficult. (1)	
24	12

15 (62%) children stated that it was easy to learn Turkish but 8 (33%) of them said that it was quite difficult and 1 (4%) child said it was difficult. The reason why children found Turkish easy or quite difficult was due to the language that was spoken at home (f=4; 33%). It was found in the study conducted by Çalışkan (2008) with Turkish children in Belgium that the most important factor for children to learn Turkish was their parents who spoke Turkish at home. Out of the 8 students who stated that they found Turkish quite difficult to learn, the reason stated by 3 of them (50%) was that Turkish alphabet was different from the German alphabet. Because Turkish children in Germany first learned to read and write in German, they could have had problems while learning to read and write in Turkish.

**Table 8. The data related to whether Turkish children know Turkish or not and their reasons**

2) Do you know Turkish well? How did you learn?/ Why were you unable to learn well?	
Yes. (16)	By parents, grandmothers, grandfathers, and etc. at home (9) Speaking Turkish at home (7) In Turkish courses. (4) Reading books written in Turkish at home. (1) My mother read a lot of books in Turkish when I was at preschool. (1) Teachers sometimes speak Turkish at preschool. (1) My parents watch Turkish TV channels at home. (1) By myself on the computer. (1)
A little. (13)	Speaking Turkish with mum at home. (2) In Turkish courses. (3) When I went to Turkey. (1) 31 Because Turkish teacher did not have us do a lot of activities. (-1) Because he spoke only German with my friends. (-1) Because he only spoke German with my mum. (-1) Because they spoke only Turkish with some family members, only German with some and sometimes they spoke in both languages. (-3) Because German was mostly spoken at home. (-2) Because they never taught some things and I did not understand. (-1)
No. (1)	Because German was mostly spoken at home. (-1)
	10
30	41

While 16 (53%) of the children stated that they knew Turkish well and 13 (43%) of them said they knew a little, one of them (3%) stated that he did not know Turkish. The children explained that they learned Turkish well or a little as their family members taught them Turkish at home (f= 9; 29%), Turkish was spoken at home (f= 9; 29%), and they learned in Turkish courses (f= 7; 22%). Moreover, they explained that they could not learn Turkish well or could learn a little as German was the only language spoken or was mostly spoken at home and both German and Turkish were spoken at home (f= 8; 80%). Regarding whether they learned Turkish well or not, it was determined by the students' explanations that the language spoken at home was effective (f= 16; 39%).

The following expressions of the two children who knew Turkish very well reveal the importance of the language which was spoken at home particularly with their mother: "I only speak German with my mother.", "My mother is German born and speaks German mostly at home". The children also explained another reason for speaking German at home with these statements: "Whatever I want to tell my younger sibling, first I say it in Turkish and then in German, so he can learn both languages.", "We teach my younger sibling German so that he can speak German in the pre-school." This situation may have resulted from the fact that the second generation immigrant parents have poor Turkish skills and Western European schools usually advise immigrants not to speak their native languages with their children (Yağmur, 2013).

During the interviews, 5 children said that German was easier because there were more courses in which German was spoken in the school and one child stated that there had to be more Turkish courses. The explanation of one of the children who knows Turkish very well draws attention: “My mother read a book written in Turkish to me when I was in the pre-school. I learned a lot of Turkish words from the books in Turkish which I read at home.”

#### **4. Suggestions**

It is an important and undeniable fact that although they are Turkish, the children born and living in Germany must learn the country’s official language better and use this language accurately in particular situations.

On the other hand, it is an individual’s desire and right to have the national identity traits and it cannot be ignored. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the concerned country has some goals and responsibilities for the existence of national and cultural components such as language and it is a requirement. In this context, regarding the results of this study, the following recommendations can be made both for the families of the Turkish children living in Germany and German and Turkish governments:

The quality of pre-service and in-service training for teachers and administrators in German schools must be evaluated considering the following points: bilingual children should be encouraged to speak German without fear and hesitation, their learning disabilities should be detected and they should be offered help to overcome them, and encouraging approaches should be adopted instead of negative sanctions such as punishment or restrictions; therefore, necessary measures must be taken considering the results.

Moreover, parents’ awareness about the importance of the language spoken at home must be raised when their children learn their native language.

Parents should motivate their children to buy and read books in Turkish. In addition, administrators at schools should ensure that there are enough books written in Turkish in the school libraries, and writers /authors should write books considering the bilingual children’s proficiency level and interest in Turkish. Moreover, publishing companies should be encouraged to provide bilingual children with books written in Turkish.

Turkish television channels which broadcast internationally must produce TV programs appropriate to bilingual Turkish children’s proficiency levels and interests so they will promote their development in Turkish.

The quality of Turkish courses which bilingual Turkish children take must be evaluated with regard to programs, learning-teaching processes, assessment and evaluation, course materials, tools, and teachers as well as taking precautions considering the results. Finally, the results of the scientific research studies must also be considered in terms of deciding which approach to adopt when bilingual children learn their native and official languages.

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