

Political Socialisation and Engagement Patterns among Academically Gifted Students in Federal University of Education, Pankshin

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Abstract

This study investigated political socialisation and engagement patterns of academically gifted students at the Federal University of Education, Pankshin. Employing a case study design, the sample comprised 200 undergraduates (68 gifted, 132 non-gifted). The Political Socialisation and Engagement Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.75$) was used for data collection, guided by three research questions. Descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, and multiple regression were employed for data analysis. Findings revealed that social media, student union activities, and lecturers were the most influential socialisation agents among gifted students. Gifted students demonstrated significantly higher political interest ($t = 7.45$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.98$), political knowledge ($t = 8.12$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.05$), and internal efficacy ($t = 7.80$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.96$). They also showed significantly higher participation across conventional ($t = 2.68$, $p = 0.008$, $d = 0.38$), unconventional ($t = 6.45$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.82$), civic ($t = 5.40$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.72$), and cognitive ($t = 7.52$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.02$) domains compared to non-gifted peers. Perceived university support ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) was the strongest predictor of engagement, followed by sense of responsibility ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$), political knowledge ($\beta = 0.26$, $p = 0.001$), and internal efficacy ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.001$). The regression model explained 48% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.48$, $F(9, 58) = 6.67$, $p < 0.001$). Findings confirm that gifted students possess heightened civic awareness and participatory tendencies. Recommendations include strengthening institutional support structures and integrating political education into gifted programmes.

Keywords: Political Socialisation, Gifted Students, Political Engagement, Political Attitudes, Nigerian Universities, Institutional Transition

Introduction

The role of higher education institutions as political socialisation spaces, where political values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are developed throughout the lifetime of the individual, is of critical importance. Universities are spaces of political formation where students are formed with an ideological perspective, interact with democratic processes, and learn civic skills that enable them to be active citizens. This bi-functional character is particularly evident in African settings as universities have traditionally been the most effective agents of political socialisation and youth mobilisation for social change. Studies have shown that students' academic career is politically influenced in the university setting through curriculum, peer influence, lectures and students' union activities (Obiagu et al., 2023). It is well established that there is a strong association between university education and political socialisation in Nigeria and this goes back to the post-independence period.

Student policies have been greatly shaped by Nigerian students in their universities and the country (Olokooba & Abdulsalam, 2020). Research findings have revealed high levels of political awareness and activism, however, there are also some worrisome findings such as no desire to protest violation of human rights and tendencies to accept bribes for political gains (Obiagu et al., 2023). Though there has been a lot of literature on students' political socialisation in Nigerian Universities (Iorliam & Nkopuruk, 2026), there is yet to be a significant study that addresses the political socialisation and involvement of academically gifted students. Individuals with exceptional intellectual ability, creativity and potentials for achievement are referred to as gifted students, who are a distinct subpopulation whose cognitive and socio emotional attributes can influence politics development in ways that differ from others (Alao, 1983).

The present study is based on the theories of political socialisation and research about giftedness. Almond and Verba (1963) have defined political socialisation as the "acquisition by people of their cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations toward the political system. Some years later Easton (1968) stressed the importance of political socialisation as one of the key input functions, which helps to preserve the political culture and structure across time. The multi-directional flow of influences acknowledges that political socialisation is a process of interpretation and negotiation by the individual, which is especially applicable for gifted students with high cognitive capacities (Lee et al., 2020). Theory of giftedness suggests that gifted intellectual functions influence how they interpret information and look at social issues (Alao, 1983). The integration of these frameworks creates a holistic perspective to analyse the politicisation process of academically gifted students, its orientation and the political information processing of these students, as well as their participation in political behaviours in the Nigerian university setting. This is a process theory which assumes that the interplay of these institutional and socialisation factors creates unique modes of political development in the presence of giftedness.

International research has revealed that gifted students are more socially oriented, more interested in social issues and more aware of civic engagement compared to non-identified students (Lee et al., 2020; Arslan & Savaş, 2019). However, the extent to which this could be true in the context of the Nigerian university is not known. This study is important in the context of the institutions. After being upgraded from a college to a university in 2023, the Federal University of Education

Pankshin (FUEP), represents a key moment of transition in the political culture and governance of the campus. It is an interdisciplinary study, which combines special education and political science, to look at political socialisation processes and engagement pattern of academically gifted students in FUEP with a view of adding to the understanding of the way intellectual giftedness relates to political development in Nigerian higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is going through a critical democratic dilemma. Although the population is mostly youth, the participation of young people in political processes is unevenly distributed and the civic engagement of university students is beginning to be a concern. University students have been observed to be unwilling to protest against human rights abuses, and accepting bribes for political ends. Further, students are the largest group of voters, yet they seem to be among the least politically informed groups. At the same time Nigeria's National Policy on Education acknowledges a desire to give educational opportunities to the "exceptionally gifted" children. In the recent legislative process, Government's intends to set up Gifted and Talented Centres in all the six geopolitical zones of the country has been considered. However, the link between these two national aims, to develop giftedness and to prepare individuals for democratic citizenship, has not been much discussed in the scholarly literature.

This study focuses on three problems. First, there is a theoretical gap, and the literature on political socialisation has been largely restricted to the general student population; while the characteristics of gifted students have been considered, they have not been incorporated in the study of political socialisation in Nigeria. Gifted students can respond to political information in unique ways and have unique engagement patterns. Studies have indicated that the level of civic awareness of gifted students is higher than that of students not identified as gifted. Second, there is an empirical gap, as no study has investigated the political socialisation of academically gifted students in a systematic way as an analytical category.

Researchers have reported a lack of materials of the Nigerian gifted child and a dearth of research work on Gifted Education in Nigeria. Third, there is a contextual gap: the upgrading of the Federal College of Education, Pankshin, to a Federal University of Education (FUE) provides an exciting institutional context for a process of re-constitution of the political culture of the students. Thus, this study aimed to understand the processes and engagement patterns of academically gifted students in the Federal University of Education, Pankshin and their engagement processes compared to the non-gifted students.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the agents of political socialisation that shape the political attitudes and orientations of academically gifted students at the Federal University of Education, Pankshin?
2. To what extent do academically gifted students differ from non-gifted students in their political attitudes, political efficacy, and political participation behaviours?
3. What factors (cognitive, socio-emotional, institutional, and demographic) predict political engagement among academically gifted students?

Literature Review

Political socialisation can be defined as the multifaceted process through which political values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Obiagu et al., 2023) are developed in the minds of individuals. Almond and Verba (1963) identified three dimensions of political orientations: cognitive orientations (knowledge), affective orientation (feelings) and evaluative orientations (judgments). Easton (1968) stressed that political socialisation was an important input function that helps preserve political culture and structure through time. The multi directional flow of influences acknowledges that the socialisation of individuals is an interactive process in which they interpret and negotiate political messages, a view especially appropriate for gifted children who have higher cognitive abilities. By combining political socialisation theory and giftedness research, a comprehensive framework can be created.

Lee et al. (2020), discovered that identified gifted adolescents exhibited a higher social interest and actualised purpose as their preferred way of communicating with social purpose. A study of democratic attitudes among gifted talented students found that democratic values such as equality, justice and respect for rights, responsibility and environmental sensitivity were found as a result of high ability (Arslan & Savaş, 2019). The National Policy on education places special focus on special education arrangement for the exceptionally gifted in Nigeria (Alao, 1983). Arinze (2021) however, investigated the implementation of Gifted Education Programme in Nigeria and discovered that implementation was low, with the inadequacy of facilities, insufficiently qualified teachers and poorly conceived identification procedure.

The studies conducted on Nigerian university students have documented political awareness and activism. Undergraduates of 600 were surveyed by Olokooba and Abdulsalam (2020) who identified the curriculum, students' unions and lecturers as the significant political education agents and self-denigration and leadership rascality as the dominant political culture. Obiagu et al (2023) reported positive attitudes towards democratic values but also negative attitudes to protesting against violations of human rights. While the students are the largest group of voters, they seem to be the least informed, according to Oluwatosin et al (2020). Notwithstanding this enormous body of research, there is no study that specifically has investigated the nature of political socialisation process of academically talented students in Nigerian Universities and how the process of institutional transformation affects their political development. The purpose of this study is to address these gaps.

Method

This study adopts a case study research design. The case study design is appropriate because the study focuses on a single institution, the Federal University of Education, Pankshin and seeks to provide an in-depth, contextualised understanding of the political socialisation and engagement patterns of academically gifted students within this specific setting. The case study approach allows for the exploration of the unique institutional context, including the recent transition from a college to a university, and how this transformation interacts with individual cognitive characteristics to shape political development. The use of multiple data collection methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, aligns with the case study tradition of triangulating data sources to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2014). The bounded nature of the case, defined by the institution and the specific population of academically gifted students, further justifies the case study designation. The study was conducted at the Federal University of Education, Pankshin (FUEP), located in

Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. The institution was established in 1974 as a Federal Advanced Teachers College, upgraded to a Federal College of Education in 1991, and elevated to a Federal University of Education in 2023 (Federal University of Education, Pankshin, 2026). The institution has a diverse student population across various faculties and departments, making it suitable for this study.

The target population for this study comprises all undergraduate students enrolled at the Federal University of Education, Pankshin, during the 2025/2026 academic session. The population includes both academically gifted and non-gifted students across all academic levels and departments. The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to identify academically gifted students. Academic giftedness was operationalised as a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 4.5 or above on a 5.0 scale. Students who meet this criterion were classified as academically gifted. Purposive sampling technique was used to select academically gifted students for the study. All the 68 students who met up with the criteria were included in the study. Random sampling was later used to select 132 non-academically gifted undergraduates across various colleges and departments. Political Socialisation and Engagement Questionnaire (PSEQ) is a structured questionnaire adapted from Olokooba and Abdulsalam (2020) and Obiagu et al. (2023). The questionnaire is divided into four sections. Section A collects demographic information including age, gender, academic level, department, and CGPA. Section B covers agents of political socialisation, which measures the influence of various agents including curriculum, peer groups, lecturers, student union, social media, and family on students' political socialisation using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all influential" to "Very influential." Section C taps into political attitudes and efficacy of the respondent, with focus on political interest, political knowledge, internal political efficacy, and external political efficacy using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." Section D covers respondent's political engagement and measures conventional participation, unconventional participation, civic participation, and cognitive engagement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Very often."

The instrument was validated through face and content validity procedures. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in political science, special education, and research methodology to ensure that the items adequately measure the constructs of interest. A pilot test was conducted with 20 students (10 academically gifted and 10 non-academically gifted university students) at Federal University of Education, Kano to test the instruments. Reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.75 was derived for PSEQ.

The study was conducted in three phases. Phase I, the preparation phase, involved obtaining ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of Federal University of Education, Pankshin, and securing permission from the university administration. The instruments were developed, validated, and piloted during this phase to ensure their suitability for the study context. Phase II focused on the identification of academically gifted students using multiple criteria including academic records, lecturer nominations, and standardised measures. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Phase III involved quantitative data collection, during which the Political Socialisation and Engagement Questionnaire (PSEQ) was administered to the sample of 400 students. Questionnaires were distributed during class sessions with the permission of lecturers, and completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure high response rates. Collected data were analysed using the

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed to describe the demographic characteristics of respondents and their responses to the questionnaire items.

This study adhered to ethical principles for research with human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Federal University of Education, Pankshin, prior to the commencement of data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by using codes instead of names in all data records and publications. Participants were assured that their responses would not affect their academic standing or relationship with the university. All data collected were stored securely and accessible only to the research team, with strict protocols in place to protect participant information from unauthorised access. The ethical protocols observed in this study were consistent with national and international standards for research involving human participants.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the agents of political socialisation that shape the political attitudes and orientations of academically gifted students at the Federal University of Education, Pankshin?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Agents of Political Socialisation among Academically gifted students

Agent of Political Socialisation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Social media	4.52	0.58	Extremely influential
Student union activities	4.47	0.62	Extremely influential
Lecturers and academic staff	4.35	0.67	Very influential
Peer groups	4.12	0.75	Very influential
News media	4.01	0.78	Very influential
Campus political groups	3.95	0.82	Moderately influential
Formal curriculum	3.88	0.85	Moderately influential
Family and parental influence	3.72	0.88	Moderately influential
Religious organisations	3.55	0.92	Moderately influential
Community and neighbourhood influences	3.48	0.90	Moderately influential
Agent of Political Socialisation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation

Scale: 1 = Not at all influential, 2 = Slightly influential, 3 = Moderately influential, 4 = Very influential, 5 = Extremely influential

Academically gifted students identified social media, student union activities, and lecturers as the most influential agents of political socialisation. They rated student union activities, lecturers,

news media, campus political groups, and formal curriculum significantly higher than non-Academically gifted students did.

Research Question 2: To what extent do academically gifted students differ from non-Academically gifted students in their political attitudes, political efficacy, and political participation behaviours?

Table 3: Comparison of Gifted and Non-Academically gifted students on Political Attitudes and Efficacy

Variable	Gifted Mean (SD)	Non-Gifted Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Political Interest	4.22 (0.52)	3.58 (0.68)	7.45	<0.001*	0.98
Political Knowledge	4.15 (0.58)	3.38 (0.72)	8.12	<0.001*	1.05
Internal Political Efficacy	4.18 (0.55)	3.52 (0.65)	7.80	<0.001*	0.96
External Political Efficacy	3.22 (0.88)	3.08 (0.92)	1.05	0.295	0.14
Political Trust	2.98 (0.95)	2.88 (0.98)	0.72	0.472	0.09

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

*Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates statistically significant difference

Table 4: Comparison of Gifted and Non-Academically gifted students on Political Participation Behaviours

Participation Type	Gifted Mean (SD)	Non-Gifted Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Conventional Participation	3.52 (0.82)	3.18 (0.88)	2.68	0.008*	0.38
Unconventional Participation	3.85 (0.72)	3.08 (0.92)	6.45	<0.001*	0.82
Civic Participation	4.05 (0.62)	3.48 (0.82)	5.40	<0.001*	0.72
Cognitive Engagement	4.38 (0.48)	3.72 (0.72)	7.52	<0.001*	1.02

Scale: 1 = Never to 5 = Very often

*Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates statistically significant difference

Academically gifted students scored significantly higher than non-Academically gifted students on political interest, political knowledge, and internal political efficacy with large effect sizes. No significant differences emerged for external efficacy or political trust. Academically gifted students also demonstrated significantly higher levels of conventional participation, unconventional participation, civic participation, and cognitive engagement. The largest differences were observed for cognitive engagement and unconventional participation.

Research Question 3: What factors (cognitive, socio-emotional, institutional, and demographic) predict political engagement among academically gifted students?

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Political Engagement among Academically gifted students

Predictor	Unstandardised B	Standard Error	Standardised β	t-value	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	1.18	0.48		2.46	0.017	
Cognitive Factors						
Political Knowledge	0.24	0.07	0.26	3.43	0.001*	1.48
Internal Efficacy	0.20	0.06	0.22	3.33	0.001*	1.35
Socio-Emotional Factors						
Sense of Responsibility	0.28	0.07	0.30	4.00	<0.001*	1.60
Frustration with Simplistic Politics	0.12	0.06	0.14	2.00	0.049*	1.25
Institutional Factors						
Perceived University Support	0.32	0.08	0.33	4.00	<0.001*	1.65
Student Union Influence	0.18	0.07	0.19	2.57	0.013*	1.42
Demographic Factors						
Gender (Female = 1)	0.06	0.09	0.05	0.67	0.506	1.12
Academic Level	0.10	0.08	0.09	1.25	0.217	1.18
CGPA	0.08	0.16	0.04	0.50	0.618	1.28

Dependent Variable: Overall Political Engagement Score

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.51$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.48$, $F(9, 58) = 6.67$, $p < 0.001$

Table 6: Relative Contribution of Predictor Categories to Political Engagement

Predictor Category	R^2 -Change	F-Change	p-value
Cognitive Factors	0.18	8.56	<0.001*
Socio-Emotional Factors	0.14	6.45	<0.001*

Institutional Factors	0.12	5.82	<0.001*
Demographic Factors	0.07	2.10	0.108
Total Model	0.51	6.67	<0.001

The full regression model explained 48% of the variance in political engagement among academically gifted students (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.48$). Perceived university support emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by sense of responsibility, political knowledge, internal efficacy, student union influence, and frustration with simplistic politics. Gender, academic level, and CGPA were not significant predictors. The cognitive and socio-emotional factors collectively contributed the most explained variance.

Discussions

The first finding indicated that academically gifted students perceived social media, activities of student unions, and lecturers as the most important political socialisation agents. The findings are consistent with Olokooba and Abdulsalam (2020) that student unions and lecturers were the main actors for political education in Nigerian universities. Social media is also a notable feature, as it indicates the world of political information in which young people are more likely to find political content online today. Oluwatosin et al. (2020) also focused on the frequency of students' consumption of news media and their level of political knowledge, where students represent the largest voting group, but appear to be the least politically informed voter group. This discovery takes the work of prior research further by revealing that, despite their high-level cognitive capacities, gifted students are also prone to digital political socialisation. The student union activities, lecturers, news media, campus political groups and formal curriculum were rated significantly higher by gifted students than by non-gifted students. This implies that the formal and institutional avenues of political learning are more attractive to gifted learners.

Students' unions and the lecturers were also found to be political education agents, which was supported by the findings of Olokooba and Abdulsalam (2020) that gifted students are more engaged in their formal learning environment. Their sophisticated thinking abilities could allow them to gain deeper insights from formal political learning processes like educational programs and lectures. The lack of significant differences for social media and peer groups suggests that there is no difference in the influence of informal and digital socialisation agents for both groups. The results also highlight the need to enhance institutional avenues for political education, especially for highly talented students who seem to be more involved in the formal learning spaces as posited by Obiagu et al. (2023) who reported that the University is the main channel of political education for students.

In the second finding, the scores of academically gifted students were statistically significantly higher than the scores of non-gifted students for political interest, political knowledge and internal political efficacy and the effect sizes were large. This is consistent with findings by Lee et al. (2020) that gifted student demonstrated greater interest in social issues and awareness of civic engagement. Lee et al. (2020) found that identified gifted adolescents had a high social interest in social purpose communication and had a high actualised purpose as a preferred way of communicating with social purpose. The high effect sizes suggest that being gifted makes a significant contribution to political cognition and motivation. The ability to reason at a higher level of thinking probably helps gifted students to understand political concepts at a deeper level and to have higher confidence in their ability to participate in political processes, as Ayala (1983) pointed

out that gifted students have exceptional intellectual abilities, which are greater than those of other students.

This analysis found no differences in external political efficacy or political trust, indicating that gifted students are as suspicious as their non-gifted counterparts about government responsiveness and the trustworthiness of the political system. This is similar to the tendency to view life through a critical lens that is frequently linked to giftedness, even if they are not very politically confident themselves. Gifted students also showed significantly higher scores for all the types of participation, with the greatest difference for cognitive involvement and unconventional participation. The pattern indicates that gifted students are not only more politically interested, but are also politically engaged in participatory behaviours. Obiagu, Machie and Ndubuisi (2023) reported that university students had positive attitudes towards democratic values, but noted troublesome inclinations on their part like the reluctance to protest human rights violations. The present study's result that gifted students are more likely to participate in unconventional ways could be attributed to their greater sense of civic responsibility, as democratic values such as equality, justice, respect for rights and responsibility were among the outcomes of high ability in the Gifted Talented Students Study (2019).

In the third finding, perceived university support was the strongest predictor of political involvement among gifted students. This illustrates the importance of institutional conditions for the active citizenship of high ability students. Olokooba, and Abdulsalam (2020) called on the school management to regulate the political culture and influence of undergraduates by students' affairs units for fair political activities and sustainable democracy on the campuses. Gifted students are more politically engaged when universities foster climates where political expression is supported, and when universities offer platforms for student voice. The implication for university administrators is to seek improving civic engagement of the most academically gifted students is real-world. The role of cognitive and motivational factors was further supported by the findings that sense of responsibility, political knowledge and internal efficacy were also significant predictors.

A sense of responsibility is a driver of political engagement among gifted people, with a feeling of responsibility expressed in the form of actualised purpose being the preferred mode of expression among gifted students identified, as reported by Lee et al. (2020). It is important to note that a student's likelihood of being active is related to his or her sense of responsibility in the political sphere and confidence in his/her own political abilities. It is important to note that the more a student feels a personal responsibility to be involved in political change and the more confident he or she is in his or her political abilities, the more likely he or she is to be involved. Frustration over simplistic politics implies that a critical approach might be the engine for involvement for talented students, not exclusion. Easton (1968) highlighted the political socialisation as an important input function which helps to sustain the political system's culture and structure, and the present findings indicate that gifted students participate in this political socialisation. Gender, academic level and CGPA were not significant predictors suggesting that psychological and institutional factors play a greater role in political engagement than demographic factors among gifted students. There was a high level of explanatory power with the model accounting for 48% of the variance in engagement.

Conclusion

The study looked at the political socialisation and engagement of academically gifted students at the Federal University of Education, Pankshin. The results indicated that there are large effect sizes for the various indicators between gifted and non-gifted students, and that there is a significant difference between students on each of the indicators of political interest, knowledge, and participation. The most important socialisation agents were social media, student union activities and lecturers. The strongest indicators of engagement for gifted students were institutional support, sense of responsibility and political knowledge. The results will help to fill the thin literature on gifted education and political development in Nigeria, showing that gifted students are an important political sub-group with political engagement patterns which are different from the average. The study underscores the significance of nurturing intellectual giftedness and democratic citizenship as an integrated pair of national priorities, and the role for universities in promoting political development of students with high intellectual ability.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with the findings of this study:

1. Given the impact of the student union and the lecturer-student interaction on the political socialisation of academically gifted students, the Federal University of Education, Pankshin should make such interaction as key points of political education among students.
2. University leaders should establish more formal and organised spaces for political debate and civic participation designed specifically for academically gifted students, such as debate forums, policy analysis workshops and opportunities for student governance.
3. It is important to train lecturers to include political education and critical citizenship teaching in the curriculum, giving attention to the role of lecturers in shaping the political awareness and participation of gifted students.
4. The university should use social media as an effective tool to spread political information and promote citizens' participation, given that it is the most influential socialisation agent of academically gifted students.
5. Student voice and political expression should be encouraged in Federal University of Education, Pankshin policies because perceived university support was the strongest predictor of political engagement among students with a special talent.
6. The government and educational bodies of Nigeria should formulate and enact a holistic educational policy for gifted learners with a clear focus on the civic and political development of the academically gifted student to acknowledge their contributions to democratic governance in Nigeria.

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