

**A NARRATIVE INQUIRY ON HOW TEACHER
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY INFLUENCES TEACHER'S
SCHOOL TYPE PREFERENCE**

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Article History:

Received: 16th October 2019

Accepted: 14th December 2019

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Keywords:

Teacher Professional
Identity; Teacher
Professional Identity
Elements; Non-formal
School; Formal School

Some Indonesian English teachers prefer teaching in formal schools while some others favor non-formal schools more. This preference can be analyzed from the lenses of teacher professional identity. In this study, the researcher tried to find out how teacher professional identity influences the school type teachers favor more. By conducting in-depth interviews to two non-formal school teachers from different regions in Indonesia, the researchers found out that job satisfaction, self-efficacy, occupational commitment, and occupational motivation are the factors influencing the participants' professional identity the most. Job satisfaction could be seen, for example, in witnessing students' progress more thoroughly; self-efficacy in being able to monitor their teaching performance; occupational commitment in teacher trainings provided by non-formal schools to build their career up; and occupational motivation in receiving manageable challenges from non-formal schools that trigger eagerness from the participants to work. Those findings could function as a reference for both formal and non-formal school stake holders in making sure that their schools could accommodate their teachers' need in constructing their professional identity as it could influence teachers' performance a lot.

INTRODUCTION

Formal education is defined as education that is institutionalized, chronologically assessed, hierarchically structured, and led by a center (Ioan &

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Istrate, 2008). This definition implies that this education sector has a set of institutional characters that each of which cannot be left behind. However, those institutional characters are not the sole elements defining formal education. Apart from those characteristics, formal education is a type of education that is performed in an educational process that involves a certain national syllabus, that follows a certain plan, and that occupies schedules, textbooks, assessments, evaluations, and the action and presence of specialized teaching staff (Lasi, 2016). All of them make formal education systematic, organized, regulated, institutionalized, and coordinated as an expression of an education policy that comes with certain common goals. Meanwhile, non-formal education is defined as every educational activity that is organized outside of the formal system (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). Further explained by Coombs & Ahmed (1974), non-formal education activities are carried out outside the formal education's framework to provide particular types of learning to certain groups of people, both children and adults.

From the definitions of formal and non-formal education above, these two types of education result in two different types of schools: formal schools and non-formal ones. The way these school types differ from each other could be obviously seen from its elements. Quoted from (Ayeni & Amanekwe, 2018), private and public high schools as the examples of formal schools usually come with lack of instructional materials, high number of teaching hours per week for teachers, lack of well-equipped classrooms and laboratories, and also large class size, all of which afford affects to both teachers' performance and students' academic performance in schools. On the other side, English course, which is referred as non-formal schools in this research, is most likely the ones equipped with abundance of instructional materials and teaching activities, lower number of teaching periods per week for teachers, classrooms and laboratories that are equipped with the latest technology, and small class size. Furtherly elaborated by Coombs & Ahmed (1974), non-formal education is organized as an educational institution with an extent of independence as well as differentiated goals by carrying the participation of various social factors and in partnership with schools. This type of education refers to any activity that is organized systematically

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outside the system of formal education in order to cater various needs of the participants such as additional or complementary or supplementary education.

The definition and characteristics of formal and non-formal education above is in line with the definition of formal and non-formal education quoted in the functions and objectives of national education of Republic of Indonesia listen in Law No. 20 of 2003 chapter II article 3. Law No. 20 of 2003 Article 13 paragraph 1 states that the education path in Indonesia consists of formal, non-formal and informal education. Formal education is a type of education held in schools in general. This pathway of education has a clear level of education, ranging from basic education, secondary education, to higher education. Meanwhile, non-formal education is a pathway to education outside formal education that can be carried out in a structured and tiered manner.

Furtherly stated by the Law No. 20 of 2003 chapter II article 3, the target of non-formal education in Indonesia is held for citizens who need educational services that function as substitutes, enhancers, and / or complementary formal education in order to support lifelong education. In addition to that, non-formal education functions to develop the potential of students with an emphasis on mastering knowledge and functional skills and developing professional attitudes and personalities such as life skills education, youth education, and language education.

The different situations of schools teachers work for thus could influence the way they work and perform. This is because the different contexts of workplace influence the way teachers define themselves and thus interpret what they experience in their working contexts. To put it another way, those different conditions between those two school types result in a lot of influence to teacher professional identity (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2011) because the different working contexts above carry some influences to teachers' beliefs and those two school types (i.e. formal and non-formal) require different types of teaching (Fang, 1996). Furthermore, that set of teachers' personal beliefs that are made up of their personal experiences, personal values, knowledge, and ideas will form their sense of teaching identity. As the result,

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these can inform teachers in which type of school they are most suited for their teaching profession (Schemjrp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1999).

Teachers' professional identity generally concerns how the teachers see and thus define themselves by referring to their own interpretation of the interactions they experience in their contexts. The teacher's interaction could be interpreted as the demonstration of teachers' occupational commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and the changing of their work occupational motivation. Those constructs are usually discussed in the related literature as being essential to the behaviors of the teachers (Firestone, 1996; Watt & Richardson, 2008). Moreover, the constructs also represent the teachers' personal perspective on how they see themselves as professionals in their work.

Job satisfaction as determined by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Condition as cited in (Billinton & Chenjian Wu, 2006) include the following three types: (a) a simple affective variable determining whether or teachers likes particular aspects of their job (Spector, 1997); (2) the extent to which teachers feel fulfilled with their needs or desires regarding their teaching job (Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, & Medlock, 2004); and (3) a both weighing input and also output of the current job compared to other jobs (Davis & Wilson, 2000). The definition of job satisfaction covers all the three types above and includes the aspects of teaching work itself and the aspects of the teaching context where teachers work as well. Occupational commitment is defined as a psychological link between someone and their occupation based on an affective reaction to that occupation (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000). Self-efficacy deals with the perception of teachers about their abilities to: (a) perform necessary professional teaching tasks and regulate any relations that need involving in the process of their teaching, and (b) perform required organizational tasks, take a role in their organization along with the social and political process (de la Torre Cruz & Casanova Arias, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Eventually, motivation is defined as a set of forces that are energetic enough to originate both beyond and within individual's being, to start behavior in their work, and to define its direction, form, duration, and intensity (Latham &

Pinder, 2005). This research refers to the definition of motivation as an energetic working force because the researcher is positive that motivation is the one driving teachers' behavior and decision in choosing the education sector they are currently working for. Teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy, occupational commitment, and the changing in their motivation level are considered as the indicators of the sense of teachers' professional identity as they play an essential role in both teachers' life and work and they represent how the interaction teachers experience in their specific context works.

This study investigates why some Indonesian English teachers prefer teaching in non-formal schools to formal ones from the lens of teacher professional identity. The non-formal schools referred by this study are English courses while the formal ones referred by this study are elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. This study will be a new additional research reference on non-formal education because regardless of its widespread use and long history, education in non-formal sector has obtained way less attention from academic scholars compared to its formal counterparts (Cohen, 2007). Similar ideas also come from (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004) teaching in formal schools like elementary school and junior high school have been widely explored while the systematic syntheses of the ones working in non-formal sectors are still lacking.

The development of the identity as a teacher is an on-going process. The process involves interpretation followed by re-interpretation of how teachers consider themselves to be and how teachers decide the kind of teachers they would like to become in the future (Beijaard et al., 2004). This on-going process is what the research is also trying to find out in the research. The researcher seeks for the underlying factors influencing teachers to work in non-formal schools rather than in formal ones. Therefore, the research questions are formulated as follows: what elements of teacher professional identity influence teachers' decision to teach in non-formal schools? And how do those elements influence the way the teachers prefer non-formal schools to formal ones?

METHOD

Participants

This research is qualitative descriptive. This research, therefore, required interview as the main research instrument. The interview involved two non-formal school teachers teaching in different non-formal schools in Indonesia. One interviewee (participant M) spent about seven years teaching in a reputable international English course in Jakarta while the other one (participant R) spent more than eight years teaching in a reputable national English course in Padang, West Sumatra. The researcher only involved two participants in order to obtain thick and in-depth description. As (Richards, 2003) said that a case study should focus on a certain set of units and should have purposeful sampling, depending on the intrinsic or instrumental value of the case.

. Both participants are not currently working in any formal schools, meaning that the one and only schools they are working for are their current non-formal schools. There is a little difference between those two participants. In her early years of teaching career, M spent about two years teaching in a formal school. Afterwards, she decided to resign and build her career in her current non-formal school in Jakarta. Meanwhile, R has never spent even a month teaching in a formal school. In other words, even since the beginning of her teaching career, she never decided to have a teaching career in informal sector.

The different teaching career journey between those two interviewees could be an additional meaningful information to this research as the researcher found two different career decisions made by two different non-formal school teachers: one was school-type switching while the other one was with the same type of school since the beginning of teaching career. The result of the interview was used to figure out the elements of teachers professional identity that influence the participants' decisions to both switch to non-formal sector and then stayed and chose non-formal sector since year one of her teaching career.

Data collection and analysis

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As mentioned above, the researcher utilized interview to collect the data. The researcher collected open-ended emerging data with the main aim of establishing several themes from the data. Moreover, the researcher utilized in-depth interview in collecting the data. The interview in this research was carried out based on the blueprint developed from the theory of occupational commitment by Lee et al. (2000) and Meyer, Allen, & Smith (1993), job satisfaction by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Condition as cited in (Billinton & Chenjian Wu, 2006), self-efficacy by e.g. (de la Torre Cruz & Casanova Arias, 2007) and de la Torre Cruz & Casanova Arias (2007), and occupational motivation by e.g. Sinclair, Dowson, & McInerney, (2006)

After completing the interview with all the participants, the researcher transcribed the interview data and then coded the data using (Charmaz, 2001) guidelines as the way to analyze the interview the data. The interview data were coded in two steps. The first coding was aimed to obtain themes expressed by the two participants. This was for finding out what was happening in the interview data (open coding). After that, the second coding was carried out to sort and to do data synthesis with the initial coding by inferring the explicit meaning expressed by the participants. Next, the researchers selected some parts of the interview result that were relevant to the elements of teacher professional identity and the characteristics of non-formal schools so that the researcher could obtain the answer of the research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Looking at the different backgrounds of the participants, the researcher tried to dig deep reflection from both participants to figure out the reasons to why their professional identity as a teacher seems to be more accommodated by this school type (i.e. non-formal school) compared to its counterparts: formal school. The interviews with the participants were conducted two times, online, and recorded. The participants resided and worked in Jakarta and Padang while the researcher was in Yogyakarta. Therefore, online interview was deemed the best way to overcome the distance between the researcher and the participants. After all the data were obtained, the researcher transcribed the interview recording and

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coded the transcript based on the keywords derived from the theory of job satisfaction, occupational commitment, self-efficacy, and motivation as listed in the literature review section.

Non-Formal Schools: When Less Means More

Coding the interview result, the researcher could derive four keywords that were frequently mentioned by the participants. They are less number of students in the schools, less strict working time, less number of teachers working in the schools, and less teaching hours. The word “less” in those keywords were favoured by the participants for they led the participants to “something more” that in fact mattered a lot to the participants as teachers.

First, it is the lesser number of students in the schools. Compared to formal schools, non-formal schools have smaller number of students. This is surely because education in non-formal schools is not obligatory in Indonesia. Education in a non-formal school is aimed to only substitute, enhance, and or complement formal education not to be the main and obligatory education (Law No. 20 of 2003 Chapter II article 13). In addition to that, education in such schools is usually organized in small classes, unlike in formal schools. Moreover, education in non-formal schools is more likely to charge students more than formal schools do. Therefore, education in non-formal schools gathers fewer students as this education sector is optional.

The reason to why smaller number of student mattered for the participants, however, is not that it made their teaching job such as classroom management easier. It was because smaller number of students afforded them more time and chances to monitor their students’ progress and to build meaningful relationships with the students. M stated, “*The interaction with my students is the best thing to why I like teaching in my current teaching job. The biggest appreciation for me is when my students achieve something.*”, while R stated “*I am very happy when my toddlers can pronounce words correctly after several trials and when they can correct their own mistakes.*” The two participants even highlighted their “happy feeling” at work when they were able to witness their students’ improvement and when they could build meaningful relationship with students. Such monitoring

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and relationship building are indeed more difficult to do when teachers are in charge of big number of students or of large size classes like in formal schools. Although it is not impossible, building significant relationship with and monitoring the progress of a big number of students require longer time, more effort, and more energy. This is similar to what R expressed in the interview: *“Formal schools have greater number of students. You will spend more time to pay attention to your students.”* Not only does this “happy feeling” provide a meaningful drive for the participants to work, it also shows the variable showing what aspects of their teaching job in non-formal schools they like. What is more, this “happy feeling” exhibits their job satisfaction (Spector, 1997), the extent to which they feel fulfilled at work (Mottet et al., 2004), and the weighing process showing comparison between their current job and other jobs (i.e. teaching in formal schools) (Davis & Wilson, 2000). In other words, this “happy feeling” demonstrates the participants’ professional identity as teachers.

Second, it is the less strict working time that leads to more opportunities to take care of teacher’s well-being. Teachers are professional workers in schools yet they also play other roles outside their workplace. Both participants highlighted the need of having work-life balance. While they were obliged to give their best to cope with the working demands in their schools, they were required to deal with their duties as wives and care taker of their families. Opting non-formal schools, for them, was a win-win solution where they could prepare what their husbands and families needed in the morning and thus proceeded to their workloads as professional teachers in schools. M stated, *“My current working school accommodate my needs to prepare some things for my family in the morning then I can start working. In formal schools, I should start working very early so that I am not able to do that.”* M is the one who did career switching from a formal-school teacher to non-formal one. She had experienced both types of schools and she has assessed all relevant aspects about her teaching work and work situation (VAN DER PLOEG & SCHOLTE, 2003) in both school types. She later found out that non-formal schools accommodated both her professional and personal needs more.

Third, it is less number of teachers that leads to higher availability of the school management to do a class visit. One of the most frequently mentioned keyword by the participants is “self-improvement”. Even in some interview questions both participants often related their answers to how the aspects of their works in their schools could provide opportunities to grow and to improve as professional teachers. The possibility of having improvement as professional teachers here is highly related to the smaller number of teachers in non-formal schools. Non-formal schools do not hire as many teachers as formal schools do because, for instance, they could only accommodate smaller number of students. This small number of teachers in fact provides bigger opportunity for the school management to conduct class or teaching supervision in each of teachers’ classes. Instead of feeling being judged, both participants found the observation from their school management significant for monitoring their performance and thus for leveling up their skills. *“It is when my supervisor comes to my class I could monitor my performance and thus improve it”* M said. *“How I monitor myself is through observation by people from the office. The observation provides me opportunity to discuss my teaching stages and activities”*, R said. From those answers, their professional identity as teachers could be identified from the way they determine self-efficacy or the aspects that play an essential role in their work ((Friedman & Kass, 2002; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Both participants felt content after being observed because they could get feedback for their teaching improvement.

Lastly, it is the less number of teaching hours that leads to longer time to prepare the teaching and to plan more proper activities for students. Preparation is necessary to make sure that the teaching process can achieve the goals and the activities can suit the children whose background and abilities vary from one class to another. This is what R believed in. *“If I prepare more, I will have longer time to think about how the students might react to the activities in my lesson plan and what the alternatives for these are”*. Teaching preparation could serve many purposes for her such as figuring out any alternatives if, for instance, plan A fails to work. This is very essential for her considering she was teaching in an area whose students speak different mother tongue from hers. Lesson planning along
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with the possibility to provide back-up plans if something does not succeed in the class take longer time. Such preparation is manageable to do if teachers are not in tight teaching schedules and R was aware enough that this need was more accommodated by non-formal schools. R explaining her need in those statements in fact exhibited her professional identity as teachers through showing her awareness of necessary professional teaching tasks that need performing (e.g. Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Non-Formal Schools: A Baby Step a Day Takes the Occupational Stagnancy Away

Coding the interview result also allows the researcher to derive another theme named “a frequent baby step to avoid occupational stagnancy”. From the interview, it could be seen that both participants shared the same value in building their career as professional teachers namely keeping on improving their capability and thus avoiding career stagnancy. The opportunity to level up their capability as professional teachers was in fact facilitated by the non-formal schools they work in. The supports and facilities to gradually take a baby step in building up their teaching career could be seen in how the schools provided teaching materials such as lesson plans, materials, and support from the school staffs in managing the class, teacher professional development (TPD) programs, and manageable challenges.

Firstly, the non-formal schools the participants worked for provided sufficient teaching supports. The teaching supports covered lesson plans, materials, lists of craft ideas along with the necessary materials, and also a school staff that was always ready to assist the teachers should an issue happen. “*The school provides me with lesson plans, craft materials, and whatever I need for teaching*”, R stated. With such teaching supports, R felt like she could easily prepare her teaching. Having lesson plans provided by the school did not mean R needed to prepare nothing for her teaching. Instead, such teaching supports could spark some teaching ideas for her. Having those ideas, she could make some modification to the provided lesson plans so that the lessons she plans could facilitate her students more. In addition to that, by having such teaching supports,

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she could have longer time to better her teaching quality. This was quite impossible to do for R in formal schools where lesson plans and all teaching activities were not provided by schools. Teachers in formal schools are required to formulate their own teaching ideas and most of the times it must be done in their tight teaching schedules. While teachers in formal schools are not equipped with sufficient time length to plan their teaching, they also lack in time for evaluating their lesson plans so far and thus for bettering the quality of their lesson plans for future teaching. From realizing the need of teaching support from schools, R was actually demonstrating her teacher professional identity that continuously assessed any relevant aspects of her work and her work situation and thus decided what to do to achieve the success of her work (VAN DER PLOEG & SCHOLTE, 2003).

Likewise, the non-formal schools the participants work for also provided another essential support through the school staff. *“One of the ways to cope with an issue in my work is by talking to the school staff. They can help me by being the bridge between me and the students’ parents. Talking to my staff can somehow release my tense in teaching”*, R stated. School staff that was always ready to take a role in supporting the teachers was important for R as it provided meaningful assistance for her. What is more, the help from the school staff could release her tense when an issue happened at work. Referring to what R experienced in her non-formal schools, the support from a school staff could help teachers accommodate their students more and thus provide better services for students. Such support from school staff is less likely to happen in formal schools considering the numbers of teachers and students are most likely big.

Equally important, non-formal schools provide Teacher Professional Development (TPD) to gradually develop the teachers’ skill and broaden their knowledge. Non-formal schools tend to supply their teachers with a wide range of trainings because this type of school is challenged to always focus on up-to-date and immediately applicable knowledge (Arlen, 1993). This facility is what makes both participants stayed in their current workplace. However, this TPD was what could possibly make them resign from their current workplace. *“If I don’t improve or if I don’t get training from this company, I will just be wasting my time and I*

may leave” M stated. Meanwhile, R stated *“One of the reasons I stay in this school is because the school provides me with trainings”* From those statements, it is obvious that it is the training that becomes the key to their eagerness to work and to sustain their working behavior (e.g. Sinclair, Dowson, & McInerney, 2006). Training is the key to avoid stagnancy in their professional teaching career. The participants agreed that stagnancy equaled a waste of time in their way of building their teaching career. This occupational stagnancy demonstrates their professional identity as teachers whose occupational commitment (Lee et al., 2000) and occupational motivation (Sinclair et al., 2006) depend a lot on what the schools could offer to help them build their teaching career.

Lastly yet importantly, it is the challenge that becomes the last reason to why both participants preferred non-formal school. From the interview result, the researcher found out that it was challenge that played a significant role for the participants in choosing what kind of schools they wanted to work in. M explained *“Should I leave my current work place, it will be about me who needs more challenge”* while R stated *“The challenges I find in my school right now is that I always need to meet different classes every day. It may be challenging yet it refreshes my mind”*. *“In formal schools, teachers are required to meet the same classes for the whole day and for me it is boring.”* R added. Although both participants worked in the same type of school (i.e. non-formal school), each of them highlighted different types of challenge they favored the most. Regardless, both challenges are the ones that are more likely to happen in non-formal schools than formal ones. As mentioned earlier, non-formal schools are always challenged to provide up-to-date knowledge that is also immediately applicable in students’ life (Arlen, 1993). Therefore, non-formal schools teachers are always required to update their teaching skills and knowledge so that they can always help students to keep up with the world’s improvement. Besides, unlike in formal schools, teachers in non-formal schools are in charge in different classes to teach even only in one day. It is very unlikely for non-formal school teachers to teach the same classes for the whole class sessions in the same day. The need of being challenged at work demonstrates the participants’ occupational motivation that

becomes one of the indicators showing their professional identity as teachers (Latham & Pinder, 2005; Sinclair et al., 2006).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In this study, the researcher tried to find out what elements of teacher professional identity influenced teachers' decision to teach in non-formal schools. The way the researcher answered the research question is by looking at the indicators of teacher professional identity namely occupational commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and occupational motivation. All of those indicators were translated into some interview questions whose results could be categorized into two major themes: "something less leading to something more" and getting rid of occupational stagnancy, two of which significantly matter for both participants.

The first theme refers to how non-formal schools the participants worked for offered "something less" to be able to provide "something more" namely the smaller number of students that enabled the participants of the research to have more time to build meaningful relationship with their students as well as monitor their students' progress more thoroughly; less number of teachers that enabled the school management to conduct closer observation to the participants' teaching that could improve their quality as professional teachers; the less strict working time that let the participants carry out their duties as care taker of their family; and lastly, less number of teaching hours that was important for the participants to have better teaching preparations. From all of the points above, it is obvious that the participants' professional identity as teachers are influenced more by their job satisfaction (Spector, 1997; VAN DER PLOEG & SCHOLTE, 2003) and self-efficacy (Friedman & Kass, 2002; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

The second theme relates a lot to how important it is to avoid occupational stagnancy. It can be seen from how meaningful and significant the support and challenges from the schools were for both participants. The lesson plans and all necessary materials provided by the non-formal school R worked for were really helpful for R to better her teaching quality while the support from school staff who was always available to help could provide significant help for R in

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overcoming issues at work. In addition to that, it is TPD or Teacher Professional Development that became one of the factors of whether or not they wanted to stay in a workplace. Finally, challenge also influenced how both participants carried out their professional teaching. A manageable challenge was considered as an important factor in the success of building their professional teaching career. From all the points above, it can be seen that the participants' professional identity as teachers are influenced more by their job satisfaction (VAN DER PLOEG & SCHOLTE, 2003), occupational commitment (Lee et al., 2000), and occupational motivation (Sinclair et al., 2006).

To sum it up, the main elements that have bigger influences to the participants' professional identity are job satisfaction, self-efficacy, occupational commitment, and also occupational motivation. Furthermore, the result of this research could function as a reference for any formal and non-formal school stakeholders in maintaining positive and encouraging working environment for teachers so that the schools could facilitate their teachers in constructing their professional identity as professional teachers. Meanwhile, recommendation for the future research covering this topic would be involving non-formal teachers who have various teaching periods in non-formal schools.

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