

STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING: PARADIGM FOR QUALITATIVE INSTRUCTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA



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Abstract

This study was to determine the relationship between student-centred learning (SCL) and qualitative instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The population comprised of 2,985 teachers drawn from public and private secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. A research sample of 750 was collected through stratified random sampling. A self designed questionnaire (SCLQIQ) was used to elicit information from the respondents. Four research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated. Mean, rank order, standard deviation and z-test were used to analyze research questions and test hypotheses. The findings reviewed frequent application of student centred learning, relevance of teacher training and strategies for improvement. The study recommended application of student-centred learning for quality instruction; capacity building or teacher training, good school environment, continuous appraisal and other relevant strategies for improvement to achieving of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Introduction

The goals of education in Nigeria are outlined to facilitate the development of individual, society and nation at large. There are inherent challenges affecting quality achievement of these goals. Be it, as it may, to this purpose, education needs to be given urgent attention at all levels, especially at the secondary level to provide the medium manpower. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE), secondary education is the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage between the ages of 12 to 18 years. It has the broad goals to prepare the individual for useful living within the society and higher education. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

Secondary school education in Nigeria is six years and divided into junior secondary school (JSS) and senior secondary school (SSS) categories of three years each. Virtually in all secondary schools these two categories exist within one premise with different administrative leadership composition. Basically, they are differentiated by their ages and uniforms. The curriculum for the two categories was designed to suit the ages of the students and purpose differently (FRN, 2014). Minimum standards were set such that junior secondary provides both pre-vocational and academic, and also graduates that may join an apprenticeship system or vocational training or proceed to senior secondary school to complete the six year secondary education (Oladipo, 2009 in Babalola & Ayeni, 2009, FRN, 2014).

Teaching and learning is carried out in different ways with much concentration on the teacher as provider of knowledge while student is receiver. Some questionable remarks have been raised and new phenomenon of learning has been positing as student-centred. To appreciate this learning approach, the national policy on education (section 1, 6e), aimed at the development of appropriate skills, mental,

physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society (FRN, 2014). The students cannot do it in isolation, as teachers' competence determines quality of any learning approach as education guiders. Quality teachers are important pillars in determining quality achievement in student-centred learning system.

Teachers need to be skilful on specific process necessary to cultivate student-centered environment and changing the focus from teaching to learning. Instructional skills are still potentially valuable in the initial orientation of novice learner; teachers need to appreciate how to work across the spectrum from such conventional guided instructions to self-directed discovery learning. Teachers are to develop individual approaches to learning, to design generative and well-structured learning experiences, harnessing the experiences and understandings of learners as they are (and as they evolve) and orientate to an emergent and inductive instructional practice. Consistent with constructivist design, it is critical; teachers develop a capability to developing generative topics and related content that build on the existing knowledge, understandings, and emotions of learners (Darwin, 2009).

Student-centred learning (SCL) is defined as an approach to education focusing on the needs of the students rather than those of others involved in the educational process such as teachers and administrators. This approach has many implications for the design of curriculum, course contents and interactivity of courses. Researchers have x-rayed SCL as able to increase academic achievement. XQTeam (2020) reviewed Nellie Mae Education Foundation study noted benefits of SCL to include

Fitting education content to student interests

Allowing students to gain competency and mastery at their own pace before moving on to other topics
Teaching students how to devise their strategies for learning

Teaching students how to monitor their progress as they learn new material.

Importantly, it involved putting student first, in contrast to teacher-centred learning. SCL is focused on the students' academic needs, abilities, interests and learning styles with the teacher as facilitator of learning. It acknowledged student voice as central to the learning experience in modeling learners towards quality academic achievement. Whereas in teacher-centred learning, the teacher is in an active role; the student is in a passive, receptive role. Student-centred learning requires students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning (Wikipedia.org./student-centred-learning).

The attractiveness of SCL is teacher exhibition of quality instruction. There is problem of in-service practitioners in implementation of student-centred learning. Some teachers have continued to adhere to traditional pedagogical orientations that informed their trainings. The popular assertion that teachers generally teach the way they were taught is not entirely unfounded. Some teachers are reluctant to think outside the box preferring to see their role as one of simply transmitting the official knowledge that they were mandated to teach. Those who want to adopt empowering strategies as routine practice are constrained by a lack of the pedagogical knowledge to do so. In effect, in-service and continuous professional development programs for teachers should be geared towards the following: using local materials to support teaching, integrating technology across the curriculum; learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning (e.g. experiential and inquiry learning, critical pedagogy) (Egbo, 2011).

The need for quality educational instruction through student-centred approach has been receiving more attention now and the teacher has also been identified as a key factor in the education delivery process and the main instrument for quality education (Agu, Omenyi & Odimegwu, 2008). There is obvious need to beef up the instructional methods in secondary schools as observed to actually drive re-engineering entire educational process.

Theoretical framework

This study anchored on Constructivism theory propounded by Jean Piaget in 1972 which stated that humans create knowledge through the interaction between their experiences and ideas (Brau, 2020). Constructivism as a theory of knowledge (epistemology) argued that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between experiences and their ideas. The educational suggestions of

this theory have helped to build in present learning theories, teaching methods and education reform. It improved knowledge by challenging the learners to be critical thinkers and teachers to be coaches and or facilitators. Moreso, learning is made easy by letting learners have freedom of progressive learning. Teachers take responses of students through exploration, conversing, and receiving students' responses there is greater synergy between teacher and students holding conversation to unravel questions to find the answers. Other constructivism proponents include John Dewey, Jerome Bruner, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky amongst others.

Piaget looked at the learning process of the child especially the stages of intellectual and moral development amongst others. Piaget's singled out the developmental stage theory about child development through psychological and physical dimensions throughout the life cycle. There is an interaction between the experiences and their reflexes or behaviour-patterns. Piaget called these systems of knowledge schemata. He saw play as an important and necessary part of the students' cognitive development and provided scientific evidence for his views.

Above all, the basic idea of constructivism is that learning is an active, constructive process, learner viewed as information constructor. Learners actively construct or create their own subjective representations of objective reality. To this end, there is flow of new information linked to prior knowledge, thus mental representations are subjective (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/constructivism). Hare (2019) stated that constructivism is a learning theory which focuses on the learner and their process to understand and integrate the content.

According to Oneil and McMahon (2005) student-centred learning (SCL) has been widely used in the teaching and learning literature. Other terms cited by Oniel et.al (2005) linked with SCL include flexible learning (Taylor, 2000), self directed learning and experiential learning (Burnard, 1999). Tangney (2013) stated that the notion of student-centred learning is often not defined; within the pedagogic literature it is generally associated with a constructivist environment such as building on prior knowledge, purposeful active learning and sense making. Consequently, SCL is appropriate in the secondary school level where the students fall within the concrete operational stage of 7 – 11 years and the formal operational stage of 12 years and above. In line with Piaget's theory, children should not be taught certain concepts until they have reached the appropriate stage of cognitive development (McLeod, 2020).

Piaget described the concrete operational stage 7 – 11 years as main turning point in the child's cognitive development because it marks the conception of logical or operational thought. Nowadays, most secondary school students are in this bracket (7-11 years), there are observable discrepancies in their reasoning on abstract or hypothetical problems at this level. The formal operational stage of cognitive development ages 12 above children can follow the form of a logical argument and can also develop the ability to reason abstract concepts, and logically test hypotheses (McLeod, 2020). It has encouraged power to be moved from the teacher to the student. It allowed learner to be actively involved in their education by giving them the ability to influence what content and how it will be presented (Hare, 2019). Knowledge is constructed by students and the teacher is a facilitator of learning rather than a presenter of information (Kember, 1997 in Oneil et.al, 2005). Learner activity rather than passivity; students experience on the course outside the institution and prior to the course; process and competence rather than content, where the key decisions about learning are made by the student through negotiation with the teacher (Gibbs, 1992 in Oneil et.al, 2005).

As important as SCL, Lea, Stephenson & Troy, (2003) in Oniel et.al (2005) noted the issues with SCL is that many institutions or educators claim to be putting SCL into practice but in reality they are not. Hare (2019) saw strong emphasis on child development and learning, and advised its application to adult education, where the learner can influence the content and presentation method based upon their background and experience. SCL to be effective must have quality assurance factors to include trained teachers and administrators, classroom ratios, good teaching and learning facilities, professional development programs, better remunerations and welfare packages amongst others. Teachers to be held at high esteem as transformers and builders of knowledge by educational authorities in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

Traditionally, teachers direct the learning process and students assume receptive role in their education. This fostered rote memorization and accumulation of knowledge constructed by others. The mindset about teaching and learning is constantly evolving into innovative ways to reach diverse learners. This is geared towards SCL where students are allowed to actively participate in discovery learning processes by providing opportunities for them to test academic theories through real world application that are universal and lifelong.

The application of SCL among others improves quality education and reposition secondary schools for better performance in terms of achievement of educational goals. The main issues that bother the study are to find out the level teachers apply SCL approach in their teaching; problems encountered in its application in their schools, if there is need for teacher training, and strategies in place for improvement in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The study looked at student-centred learning: paradigm for qualitative instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Specifically, it achieved the following:

1. discovered the level teachers apply student-centred learning in their teaching for the achievement of quality education.
2. reviewed the need for teacher training in achieving quality in schools.
3. explored the problems encountered by teachers in applying student-centred learning approaches to achieve quality in secondary school.
4. determined the strategies for improvement in the application of student-centred learning for qualitative delivery of instruction.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of teacher application of student-centred learning in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria?
2. What is the relevance of teacher training in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria?
3. What are the problems encountered by teachers in applying student-centred learning in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria?
4. What are the strategies for improvement in the application of student-centred learning in achieving quality education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between the opinions of public and private secondary school teachers on the level of the application of student-centred learning in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between the opinions of public and private secondary school teachers on the problems they encounter in applying student-centred learning in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Methodology

The research design used was the co-relational design concerned with determining the relationship between the two variables under study (student-centred learning and qualitative instruction). The population comprised of 2,985 teachers drawn from public and private secondary schools in Port Harcourt. The sample size was 750 comprising of 450 teachers in public secondary schools and 300 teachers in private secondary schools which were selected through stratified random sampling. A self designed questionnaire known as “Student-centred learning for qualitative instruction questionnaire (SCLQIQ)” was used to elicit responses from the respondents. The 20 item questionnaire generated had two sections: A and B, section A generated demographic data while section B elicited information related to the research topic. The response scale was patterned after a modified four points Likert Scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by experts in educational management. A test-retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument within an interval of two weeks. The reliability index obtained was 0.78 using the product moment correlation coefficient in analyzing the two sets of scores. The questionnaire was personally administered by the researchers and they retrieved same on completion for analysis. A total number of 750 respondents were issued questionnaire but 720 were retrieved. This comprised of 430 public secondary schools teachers and 290 private secondary school teachers. The data collected were tabulated, coded and analyzed and deductions from the tables were used to find solution to the research questions and test the hypotheses. The statistical tools used for the analysis were Mean and Rank order for the research questions. Mean score above 2.50 show agreement while mean score below 2.50 shows disagreement. The z-test of difference was used for testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Analysis of Result

Research Question 1: What is the level of teacher application of student-centered learning in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean (\bar{x}) and rank order statistics scores on the level of teachers' application of student centered learning in the achievement of quality instruction.

S/N	Level of teachers application on student-centered learning	Mean (\bar{X})	Rank order
1	Teachers frequently involve the student in team work, independent project, quiz, practical and field trips.	3.04	1 st
2	Teachers seldom involve the students in team work and class activities.	2.15	4 th
3	Teachers always allow students to construct their own knowledge which is discovery learning.	2.71	3 rd
4	Teachers are passive while students are very active in the student learning approach, thereby enhancing greater autonomy and control of choice of study.	2.98	2 nd
5	Teachers are nonchalant about student-centred learning approach.	1.76	5 th

Number (N) of respondents = 720

Data in Table 1 showed that teachers frequently involved students during teaching; this made them very active hence they were allowed to construct their own knowledge. The mean values of 1,3 & 4 were above the mid-point of 2.50 while items 2 and 5 were not indicative of the corresponding level of teachers application on student centered learning in the achievement of quality instruction as they indicated that teachers seldom involve the students in team work/class activities and that they are nonchalant about student-centred learning.

Research Question 2: What is the relevance of teacher training in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Table 1: Mean (\bar{x}) and rank order statistics scores on the relevance of teacher training in the achievement of quality in schools.

S/N	Relevance of Teacher Training	Mean (\bar{X})	Rank Order
6	Teachers' professional growth invariably leads to students motivation, high morale and better performance.	3.09	3 rd
7	Pre-service and in-service programme enables students to measure up with contemporary issues.	3.16	2 nd

8	Effective capacity building incidentally leads to national development.	2.60	5 th
9	Capacity building brings about transformative learning which leads to a profound change in consciousness or perspective in the learner.	2.82	4 th
10	Since teachers play pivotal role in education, adequate training or competence demonstrates commensurate student proficiency.	3.20	1 st

N = 720

Data in Table 2 showed that all the mean values were above the mid-point of 2.50. These indicated the relevance of teacher training in the achievement of quality in schools. In order of magnitude, adequate training is commensurate with student proficiency, student ability to measure up with contemporary issues leading to motivation, high morals and better performances. Capacity building brings about transformation learning while effective capacity building leads to national development.

Research Question 3: What are the problems encountered by teachers in applying student-centered learning in the in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Nigeria.

Table 3: Mean(x) and rank order statistics scores on the problems encountered by teachers in applying student-centered learning in the achievement of quality instruction in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Nigeria.

S/N	Problems teachers encounter in applying student centered learning	Mean (\bar{x})	Rank Order
11	In practice evolution is difficult	2.85	1 st
12	It may steep learning curves on the instructor (there is instructor awkwardness).	2.53	5 th
13	It is too demanding and time consuming.	2.70	2 nd
14	It makes teachers passive	2.56	4 th
15	Teachers are faced with meeting the needs to diverse learners.	2.63	3 rd

N = 720

Table 3 indicated mean values above the criterion mean of 2.50. These indicated some of the problems encountered by teachers in applying student centred learning in the achievement of quality in secondary schools. They include the fact that evaluation is difficult; student centered learning being too demanding/time consuming, diversity of learners, teachers being passive and the imposition of steep learning curves on the instructor.

Research Question 4: What are the strategies for improvement in the application of student centred learning in achievement of quality education in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Table 4: Mean (x)and rank order statistics scores on the strategies for improvement in the application of student centred learning in achieving quality education.

S/N	Strategies for improvement in the application of student centred learning	Mean (\bar{x})	Rank Order
16	Project based learning and peer teaching	3.16	2 nd
17	Dramatization/role play and use of field trips.	3.07	3 rd
18	Metacognitive behaviours are enhanced	3.20	1 st
19	Demonstration and multimedia based learning	2.85	5 th
20	Computer based multimedia and concept formation	2.99	4 th

N = 720

Table 4 showed that all the mean values were above the mid –point of 2.50. These were the strategies for improvement in the application of student-centred learning in achieving quality education. In order of magnitude, metacognitive behaviours are enhanced, project based learning and peer teaching, dramatization/role play and use of field trips, computer based multimedia and concept formation, and demonstration and multimedia based learning.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference between the opinions of public and private secondary school teachers on the level of the application of student centred learning in the achievement of quality instructions in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Table 5: z-testanalysis of the level of the application of student-centred learning in the achievement of quality instruction in private and public secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

	N	\bar{x}	SD	Z-CAL	Z-CRI	DF	Level of Significance	Remark
Public Secondary School	430	2.65	0.86					No
Privatesecondary School	290	2.53	0.89	0.87	1.96	718	0.05	Significant difference

A critical look at the table shows that the z-calculated value of 0.87 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom of 718. The null hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is no significant difference between the opinions of public and private secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt, Nigeria on the level of application of student centred learning in the achievement of quality instruction.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the opinions of public and private secondary school teachers on the problems they encounter in applying student-centred learning in the achievement of quality in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Table 6: z- test analysis of the problems teachers encounter in applying student-centred learning in the achievement of quality in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

	N	\bar{x}	SD	Z-CAL	Z-CRI	DF	Level of Significance	Remark
Public secondary school	430	3.13	0.73					No
Private secondary school	290	3.05	0.67	1.09	1.96	718	0.05	significant difference

Table 6shows that z-calculated value of 1.09 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 718 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance and re-affirms that there is no significant difference between the opinion of public and private secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt, Nigeria on the problems they encounter in applying student-centred learning in the achievement of quality in secondary schools.

Summary of findings

1. The level of teachers application of student-centred learning in the achievement of quality instruction is anchored on the facts that they frequently involve students in team work and class activities, they are passive while students are active and teachers always allowed students to construct their own knowledge which is discovery learning. It was however observed that teachers did not agree on the facts that they seldom involve students in team work and class activities and that they are nonchalant about student centred learning.

2. The relevance of teacher training in the achievement of quality in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria is enshrined on the facts that adequate training demonstrates commensurate student proficiency, pre-service and in-service programmes enables students to measure up with contemporary issues, teachers professional growth invariably leads to student motivation, high morale and better performance, capacity building brings about transformative learning and leads to national development.
3. In practice evaluation is difficult, it is too demanding and time consuming, teachers are faced with meeting the needs of diverse learners, it makes teachers passive and it may impose steep learning curves were the problems teachers encountered in the application of student-centred learning in the achievement of quality in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
4. The strategies for improvement in the application of student-centred learning in achieving quality education is anchored on the followings: metacognitive behaviours are enhanced, project based learning and peer teaching, dramatization/role play and used of field trips, computer based multimedia and concepts formation, demonstrations and multimedia based learning.
5. There is no significant difference between the opinions of public and private school teachers on the level of the application of student-centred learning in the achievement of quality education in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
6. There is no significant difference between the opinions of public and private secondary school teachers on the problems they encountered in applying student-centred learning in the achievement of quality in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Discussion

Frequency of teachers' involvement of students in team work and class room activities makes students to be very active thereby enhancing greater autonomy as they are always allowed to construct their own knowledge which is discovery learning. These were the level of teachers' application of student-centred learning in the achievement of quality instruction. These findings are supported by Gibbs (1992) assertion in Onuebunwa (2012) that issues of greater autonomy, control of choice of study constitute autonomy, control of choice of study constitute key hall marks of learner-centred learning. Brenda (2006) supported that "student-centred learning is all about helping students to discover their own learning styles, effective study skills that will be valuable throughout their lives. To put this approach into practice, teachers need to help students work co-operatively in group and ensure that they know how to exploit all the available resources for learning".

The relevance of teachers training in the achievement of quality in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria demonstrates commensurate student proficiency, enabled students to measure with contemporary issues, student motivation, transformative learning and national development since teachers play pivotal role in education. These conformed to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2005) assertion that "since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development. That is the present quality of Nigerian education is the quality of Nigerian teacher. Federal Government of Nigeria further stated among others that the goals of teacher education shall be to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system". This conformed to Niyozov (2008) in Egbo (2011) postulation that "across much of the developed world, there is a renewed emphasis on the quality of teachers and teacher education. Indeed, no nation can build a strong and effective educational system without the continuous appraisal and subsequent improvement of its teacher training programmes since teachers remain the pillar of the educational system.

The problems encountered by teachers in applying SCL in the achievement of quality in secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria consisted of the followings: in practice evaluation is difficult, it is too demanding and time consuming, teachers are passive and it may impose steep learning

curves on the instructor. These findings are affirmed in [Wikipedia.org/wiki/student-centred-learning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/student-centred-learning) as it stated thus “One of the most critical differences between student-centred learning and teacher-centred learning is in assessment. In student-centred learning, students participate in the evaluation and in deciding how to demonstrate their learning.

Developing assessment and audits that supports learning and motivation is essential to the success of SCL. One of the main reasons teachers’ resist SCL is the view of assessment as problematic in practice. Since teacher-assigned grades are so tightly woven into the fabric of schools, expected by students, parents and administrators alike, allowing students to participate in assessment is somewhat contentious”. Attard, Di Loio, Gevenand Santa (2010) affirmed it that “time needs to be invested in shared decision making, both to improve the quality of the decision as well as to reduce the resistance to the implementation of the decision”.

The strategies for improving the application of SCL in achieving quality education includes: metacognitive behaviours are enhanced, project based learning and peer teaching, dramatization/role play and the use of field trips, computer based multimedia and concert formation, demonstrations and multimedia based learning. These findings are supported by Brown (1987) who perceived metacognitive skills as the voluntary control learners have over their cognitive processes. He identified four types: prediction to assess task difficulty, planning-things that should be done for task execution, monitoring-things to know to attain objectives and evaluation – requirements to grasp full meaning of the problem.

In furtherance, Blumenfield et al (1991) in Onuebunwa (2012) presented project based learning as providing opportunity for many learners to be involved in active learning. Carefully chosen projects related to particular subjects are given to individuals or group of students. By so doing, individual learning experience may be achieved. The prerequisite of learner-centredness is that the learner should be given opportunity to process information, solve problems and make his own decisions.

Conclusion

The frequent application of SCL enhanced the achievement of quality instruction as it is geared towards self-directed learning. But then, adequate teacher training or capacity building is necessary to realize this transformation in students, because motivated teachers invariably produce motivated students. Though evaluation or assessment is a major constraint of SCL, teamwork, metacognition and other strategies should continuously be emphasized as they are indicators of quality output via SCL approach.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

Secondary school teachers should always apply student-centred learning approach in the teaching – learning process as it leads to student construction of knowledge. This invariably leads to self-directed learning and makes them autonomous, thereby reducing rote memorization.

Teachers’ employers should take capacity building or teacher training seriously as it produces sound teachers that will produce sound students for national development.

The strategies for improvement in the application of student-centred learning should be encouraged and appraised from time to time to maintain quality education.

Improved remunerations and welfare packages for teachers to enable carrying out well their statutory functions in school. This will enable them pay adequate attention to the academic needs of the students.

Design programs for periodic staff professional development through conferences, workshops, seminars, in-service trainings amongst others

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