



**Determining the Textual Characteristics of Pre-primary and Primary 3 Recommended English Textbooks Using Fog Index Requirements in Rivers State, Nigeria**

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Submitted: December 8, 2020; Revised: February 25, 2021; Accepted: March 8, 2021

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**Abstract**

*The study assessed the textual characteristics of recommended English language textbooks for nursery 3 and primary 3 pupils in Rivers State using Fog Index. The aim of any textbook, especially English language textbook is to help readers improve their competence in reading and understanding of the subject. This aim is defeated when learners cannot read such texts intended for them. One research question was used to measure the requirements of textual characteristics in terms of: pictorial illustration, font size, syllables count (mono syllables and multi syllables) and texts in its original form at the pre-primary level in Rivers State. This study used the ex-post facto research design. The instrument used to collect data were the Selected passages from recommended texts for nursery 3 using Readability Measurement Scales of Fog Index (FI). The internal consistency of the instruments yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Results reveals that majority of the textbooks were ideal or not too hard, while few of the books were too hard or difficult to read. Specifically, out of the eight textbooks used for the study, six met the requirements using fog index while two did not. This result seems controversial in the sense that some authors followed the rules while some did not. It is therefore, recommended that schools should use the textbooks that met the requirements of fog index for their pupils in order to increase their level of readability and performance in English language.*

**Introduction**

Textbooks play important roles in teaching learning processes especially in developing countries such as Nigeria because they are relevant to improving pupils' learning outcomes. A well-designed textbook in sufficient quantities and qualities are the most effective way to improve instruction and learning. Children can spend many of their school hours copying content from the blackboard, which severely reduces time for engaged learning and may not have the opportunity to study on their own outside the classroom.

Textbooks are considered as the sole and legitimate source of knowledge for both learners and teachers (Bano, 2005). To Bano, information presented in textbooks plays a pivotal role in shaping the process of classroom teaching and learning, designing of assessment system and evaluating learners memorizing and reproducing the information presented in textbooks. Since reading is related to human visualisation, it is important to consider type setting or font size features and the medium through which the text is presented (Salinger and Campbell, 2002). The appearance and the medium or size of the text can influence the reader whether they will read it or not. Things such as features of print, font, and lay out can be important in causing reading ease or difficulty which may make or mar academic achievement.

A good textbook for the lower level of education, should provide fascinating pictures for the children. Picture books provide children with opportunities to interpret and evaluate texts and also motivate them to read more. Picture books should be popular in the early years of education, but experience has shown that often these picture books are put aside once children reach year 6. Picture books represent a unique visual and literacy art form that engages pupils in many levels of learning and pleasure (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2007). The emphasis on the spelling picture book has been a deliberate one. What makes picture books so intriguing is that the text and the images usually tell the exact same story (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2007).

It has been observed from personal experience that pupils at the pre-primary and primary level of education in Rivers state perform poorly in English language. Some of the problems observed by the researcher are teacher qualification, teaching experience, poor learning environment, lack and poor use of instructional materials, and lastly the readability level of English language textbooks. This has become a source of worry to the researcher knowing fully well that this level of education is regarded as the foundation of all other levels, hence the problems observed must be addressed properly. The readability level of a textbook can be carried out in a number of ways which includes using Winnetka Formular, Spache Readability Formular designed for primary grade books, Fry Readability Formular, SMOG Formular, FOG Index Formular and Cloze Procedure. However, for the purpose of this study FOG Index was used in determining the textual characteristics of nursery 3 and primary 3 English studies textbooks. The first readability formula that Gunning created was the Fog Index. The two variables that this formula was dependent on were “average sentence length and the number of words with more than two syllables for each 100 words” (DuBay, 2004). The Gunning FOG Readability test/index is simply referred to as FOG Index. It was developed by an American textbook publisher named Robert Gunning in 1952. He published this readability test in reaction to his observations that school graduates were unable to read. The underlying principle of the Gunning Fog Index formula is that short sentences in plain English achieve better scores than long sentences written in complicated language. The ideal score for readability with the fog index is 7 or 8 and

anything above 12 is too difficult for most people to read. Though the fog index gives a sign of hard to read text, it has some limitations. It must be noted that not all complex words are difficult since some short words can be difficult if they are not used very often. The same can be said about sentences (Readability formulas, 2018).

The specific objective of pre-primary education is to provide all necessary care and education to young children for their development through physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional growth (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). There is also evidence that early learning improves the child's chances of enjoying good health, finding work later in life, being socially skilled, and not committing crimes (Okujagu, 2003). In the relevant literature consulted, there appears to be lack of empirical studies showing how readability levels of selected recommended English language textbooks in Rivers state were established. Determining the readability level will ascertain information on the sentence length, number of syllables contained in the words, the nature of the fonts, and the vocabulary content of the text. It is therefore, against this background that the study seeks assessed the textual characteristics of recommended English language textbooks for nursery 3 and primary 3 pupils in Rivers State using Fog Index.

Based on the stated problem, two research questions were generated to guide this study:

**Research Question 1:** What are the characteristics of the selected English reading texts recommended for pre-primary school pupils in terms of:

- i. pictorial illustration
- ii. font size
- iii. syllables count (mono syllables and multi syllables) in Rivers State?

**Research Question 2:** What are the characteristics of the selected English reading texts recommended for pre-primary school pupils in terms of:

- i. pictorial illustration
- ii. font size
- iii. syllables count (mono syllables and multi syllables) in Rivers State?

### **Methodology**

This study used the ex-post facto research design. The ex-post facto design was used in establishing the textbook characteristics. This is because the passages selected were not altered but were used in their original form. The ex-post facto research as described by Kerlinger and Lee (2000) is a systematic empirical inquiry in which the scientist does not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred or because they are inherently not manipulated. Inferences about relations among variables are made, without direct intervention, on the independent and dependent variables.

### **Instrumentation and Instruments**

The under listed instruments were used to collect data that provided answers to the research questions:

1. Selected passages from eight recommended textbooks each for nursery 3 and primary 3 using Readability Measurement Scales - Fog Index (FI)

### **Steps to the construction and use of The Gunning's Fog index (or FOG)**

#### **Readability Formula**

**Step 1:** A sample passage of at least 100-words and count the number of exact words and sentences, will be taken from the selected texts.

**Step 2:** The total number of words in the sample will be divided by the number of sentences to arrive at the Average Sentence Length (ASL).

**Step 3:** The number of words with three or more syllables that are not (i) proper nouns (ii) combinations of easy words or hyphenated words, or (iii) two syllable verbs made into three with -es and -ed endings will be counted.

**Step 4:** The number generated will be divided by the number of words in the sample passage. For example, 25 long words divided by 100 words gives you 25 Percent Hard Words (PHW).

**Step 5:** The ASL from Step 2 will be added with and the PHW from Step 4.

**Step 6:** The result will be multiplied by 0.4.

The mathematical formula is:  $\text{Grade Level} = 0.4 (\text{ASL} + \text{PHW})$  where:

**ASL** = Average Sentence Length (i.e number of words divided by the number of sentences)

**PHW** = Percentage of Hard Words.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Instruments**

All the instruments were given to experts for review to help establish the face and content validity. Thereafter, the instruments were trial tested on a different population with similar characteristics with the intended and the internal consistency of the instruments which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher collected a letter of introduction from the International Centre for Educational Evaluation (ICEE), Institute of Education, University of Ibadan. Permission was sought from the head-teachers of the selected schools. The researcher engaged the services of research assistants from each of the selected schools where the study was carried out. The research assistants were properly trained on the rudiments of data collection with emphasis on how to use the instruments for this study.

The data collection process was done in stages.

**Stage 1:** This entailed the use of Fog Index to check the characteristics of the selected recommended textbooks. Comprehension passages were selected and their characteristics were measured using the number of words in the passage, number of sentences, the sentence length, number of three or more syllable words, percentage of hard words in each passage, font size and pictorial illustration used.

**Stage 2:** This stage involved the selection of comprehension passages from the recommended text books and reconstructs them using the following textual characteristics:

- a. Pictorial illustration
- b. Font size (12, 14 & 16)
- c. Syllables count (mono syllable & multi syllables)
- d. Average sentence length

### **Data Analysis**

The readability formulas for Fog Index was used to select the textbooks for the study. This formula only uses two variables, average sentence length (ASL) and the number of words with more than two syllables for each 100 words. The formula for Fog Index will be used to analyse the reading ability of the pupils i.e grade level = .4 (average sentence length + percentage hard words) where: hard words = number of words of more than two syllables. The ideal score for readability grade level with the Fog Index will be 7 or 8. Any score below 5 is considered too simple for pupils while any score above 12 is too hard for most people to read.

### **Results**

**Research Question 1a:** What are the characteristics of the selected English reading texts recommended for pre-primary school pupils in terms of:

- i. pictorial illustration
- ii. font size
- iii. syllables count (mono syllables and multi syllables) in Rivers State?

**Table 1: Textual Characteristics of Pre-primary Textbooks Using Fog Index Requirements**

Texts	Page number selected	No of words in the passage	No of sentences in the passage	Average Sentence Length (ASL)	No of Three Syllable Words	Percentage of Hard Words	Score 0.4(ASL + PHW)	FONT SIZE			Pictorial Illustration	Remark
								12	14	16		
1.	61	82	10	8	18	22	12		X		Not in line with the passage	Too hard
	87	109	9	12	18	17	12		X		In line with the passage	Too hard
2.	7	109	10	11	15	14	10		X		In line with the passage	Too hard
	8	176	16	11	20	11	9		X		In line with the passage	Too hard
	12-13	115	8	14	14	12	10		X		In line with the passage	Too hard
3.	17-20	94	8	12	5	5	7	X			In line with the passage	Ideal
	23-29	100	10	10	4	4	6	X			In line with the passage	Ideal
	32-38	118	8	15	4	3	7	X			In line with the passage	Ideal
4.	1-6	100	16	6	10	10	6			x	In line with the passage	Ideal
	16-18	107	20	5	14	13	7		X		Not in line with the passage	Ideal
	30	116	16	7	19	16	9		X		In line with the passage	Too hard
5.	4	205	12	17	13	6	9			x	In line with the passage	Too hard
	11	142	9	16	9	6	9			x	In line with the passage	Too hard
	25	130	9	14	6	5	8			x	In line with the passage	Ideal
6.	1-2	140	11	13	7	5	7			x	In line with the passage	Ideal
	3-4	132	10	13	6	5	7			X	In line with the passage	Ideal
	5-6	235	18	13	14	6	8			X	In line with the passage	Ideal
7.	35-36	199	27	7.3	51	26	13.3		X		In line with the passage.	Too hard
	134	90	11	8.1	37	41.1	20	X			In line with the passage.	Too hard
8.	64	70	6	12	26	37.1	15.2	X			In line with the passage.	Too hard
	84	76	6	13	33	43.4	18.4		X		In line with the passage.	Too hard

The textual characteristics of the recommended English reading texts for pre-primary school pupils were examined using variables such as number of words in the passage, number of sentences, average sentence length, number of three syllable words, percentage of hard words, font size and pictorial illustration. Eight books were selected among other recommended English texts for this level. From each book selected, at least, two pages were randomly selected and used in determining the textual characteristics. For book 1, pages 61 and 87 were used. Table 1 indicates that the number of words used on the pages were 82 and 109 while the number of sentences in the passages were 10 and 9, average sentence length 8 and 12, number of three syllable words 18 on each, percentage of hard words were 22 and 17 while font 14 was used for each passage. The pictorial illustration used on the table shows that the illustrations used on page 61 are not in line with passage whereas that of page 87 was in line. However, since the corresponding grade level the text is appropriate for in grade level 12 which is equivalent of SSS3.

The Table also reveals that for the second book 2, three passages were used. They appeared on pages 7, 8, 12–13. The number of words on each passage were 109, 176 and 115; number of sentences were 10, 16 and 8 while the average sentence length were 11 and 14. The number of words with three syllables 15, 20, 14; percentage of hard words were 14, 11 and 12 while the corresponding grade level were 10 and 9. With respect to font size, the number used on the passages were font 14 and the Table shows that the pictorial illustration used in the three passages are in line with the passage. The remark therefore is that the textbook is too hard for the level of the learners.

For the third book, the Table reveals that some passages spread across more than four pages (17-20, 23-29, 32-38). The number of words in the passages ranged from 94 to 118; number of sentences were 8 to 10; the sentence lengths were 12, 10 and 15; the three syllable words identified were between 4 and 5 while the percentage of hard words used ranged from 3 to 5. With respect to the corresponding grade level the passages should be adequate for, the Table shows that the passages are good for grade levels 6 and 7. The font size used is 12 while the pictorial illustrations were in line with the story. The conclusion is that the book is ideal for this level.

Table 1 also indicates, that the passages used in the 4<sup>th</sup> book runs between 3 to 6 pages, the number of words on each passage were from 100 to 116; the number of sentences used were between 16 and 20 while their sentence length ranged from 5 to 7. The number of three syllable words 10, 14 and 19 respectively, percentage of hard words were 10, 13 and 16, the corresponding grade level is 6, 7, and 9, the font size used for the passages were 14 and 16 while the pictorial illustration is not in line with the passage (pages 16 – 18) but corresponds with the story on pages 1 – 6 and 30.

The Table also reveals that the 5<sup>th</sup> book used also should similar characteristics the pages used (4, 11 and 25) have 205, 130 words in the passages, the number of sentences on each page ranged from 9 to 12, the average sentence length were 17, 16, 14 respectively, number of three syllable words ranged from 6 to 13, percentages of hard words was 6, 6, 5 respectively, score generated was 9 across the three passages used, the font size used was 16 and the pictorial illustration for the passages were in line with the narration in the passage. The conclusion is that the passages are ideal for the level it was meant for because the score generated was 9.

With respect to the sixth book used, the Table shows that passages selected spans to three pages (1 -2; 3 – 4; 5 – 6), the number of words used were 140, 132 and 235, the number of sentences in each passage were 11, 10 and 18; the average sentence length in the three passages was thirteen, while the number of words with more than two syllables were 7, 6 and 14 respectively. Furthermore, the percentage of hard words were between five and six, the scores generated were 7, 7, and 8 indicating that the passages were ideal for the level they were meant for, whereas the font size used was 16 and the pictorial illustration were in line with the narration on the passage. The Table also revealed that characteristics of books 7 and 8 used were not too different from those identified in the books. The major strickling differences are that the font size used were 12 and 14 and the reading score generated were far too high when compared to the other books (13.3, 20, 15.2 and 18.4) respectively, thus signifying that the passages used in those books were too hard for the level they are meant for.

**Research Question 2:** What are the characteristics of the selected English reading texts recommended for primary 3 school pupils in terms of:

1. pictorial illustration
2. font size syllables count (mono syllables and multi syllables) in Rivers State?

**Table 2: Textual Characteristics of Pre-primary Textbooks Using Fog Index Requirements**

1	Page number selected	No of words in the passage	No of sentences in the passage	Average Sentence Length (ASL)	No of Three Syllables Words	Percentage of Hard Words	Score	Font Size			Pictorial Illustration	Remark
								12	14	16		
1.	15	155	9	17	3	13	19.8			X	Not in line with the passage	Difficult
	22	170	15	11	4	10	14.4		X		In line with the passage	Difficult
	31	226	18	13	6	3	16		X		In line with the passage	Difficult
2.	10	196	24	8	1	0.5	3.4		X		Not in line with the passage	Too simple
	61	263	16	16	7	3	8		X		In line with the passage	Ideal
	125	117	16	7	1	0.8	3		X		Not in line with the passage	Too simple
3.	6	266	19	14	7	3	7	X			In line with the passage	Ideal
	56	232	18	13	4	1.7	6				In line with the passage	Ideal
	147	217	17	13	4	1.8	6				In line with the passage	Ideal
4.	29	393	24	16	12	3.0	8	X			In line with the passage	Ideal
	39	253	18	14	7	3	7				In line with the passage	Ideal
	103	187	16	12	2	1.0	13				In line with the passage	Difficult
5.	44	138	22	6	2	1	3		X		Not in line with the passage	Too simple
	92	208	24	9	2	0.1	4				Not in line with the passage	Too simple
	119	266	30	9	1	0.4	4				Not in line with the passage	Too simple
6.	60	158	18	9	3	2	4			X	Not in line with the passage	Too simple
	83	190	21	9	1	1	4			X	Not in line with the passage	Too simple
	124	181	16	11	5	3	6			X	In line with the passage	Ideal
7.	56-57	346	34	11	79	23	14	X			In line with the passage	Difficult
	105-106	345	34	10.1	73	21.1	12.4	X			In line with the passage	Difficult
	109-110	349	30	12	65	19	12.4	X			In line with the passage.	Difficult
8.	64	219	14	16	56	26	17	X			In line with the passage	Difficult
	65	265	22	12	50	19	12.4	X			In line with the passage	Difficult
		72	20	11	76	36.1	19	X			In line with the passage	Difficult

The textual characteristics of the recommended English reading texts for primary 3 school pupils were examined using variables such as number of words in the passage, number of sentences, average sentence length, number of three syllable words, percentage of hard words, font size and pictorial illustration. Eight books were selected among other recommended English texts for this level. From each book selected, at least, two pages were randomly selected and used in determining the textual characteristics. For book 1, pages 15, 22 and 31 were used. The Table indicates that the number of words used on the pages were 155, 170 and 226 while the number of sentences in the passages were 9, 15 and 18, average sentence length 17, 11 and 13, number of three syllable words are 3, 4 and 6, percentage of hard words were 13, 10 and 3, while font 14 was used for each passage. The pictorial illustration used on the Table shows that the illustrations used on page 15 are not in line with the passage whereas that of pages 22 and 31 were in line. However, since the corresponding grade level of the text is appropriate for is grade level 12, it shows that the passages are too hard or difficult for the pupils.



Table 2 also reveals that for the second book, three passages were used. They appeared on pages 10, 61 and 125. The number of words on each passage were 196, 263, and 117; number of sentences were 24, 16 and 16 while the average sentence length were 8, 16 and 7. The number of words with three syllables 1, 7 and 1; percentage of hard words were 0.5, 3 and 0.8 while the corresponding grade level were 3.4, 8 and 3. With respect to font size, the number used on the passages were font 14, and the Table shows that the pictorial illustration used in the two of the passages, that is pages 10 and 125 were not in line, while that of page 61 is in line. The remark therefore is that the textbook is too simple for the level of the learners.

For the third book, the Table reveals that three passages were used. They appeared on pages 6, 56 and 147. The number of words on each passage were 266, 232 and 217; number of sentences were 19, 18 and 17 while the average sentence lengths were 14, 13 and 13. The number of words with three syllables 7, 4 and 4; percentage of hard words were 3, 1.7 and 1.8 while the corresponding grade level were 7, 6 and 6. With respect to font size, the number used on the passages were 12 and the Table shows that the pictorial illustration used in the three passages are in line with the story. The remark therefore is that the textbook is ideal for the level of the learners.

The Table also indicates that the passages used in the text book are on pages 29, 39 and 103; the number of words on each passage were 393, 253 and 187; the number of sentences used were 24, 18 and 16, while their sentence length ranged from 12 to 16. The number of three syllable words 12, 7 and 2 respectively. Percentage of hard words were 3.0, 3 and 1.0; the corresponding grade level is 8, 7 and 13, the font size used for the passages is 12, while the pictorial illustrations are in line with the passages. It is therefore concluded that passages on pages 29 and 39 were ideal for the class for which it is meant for, while that of page 103 is not ideal or too hard.

Table 2 also reveals that the 5th book used also showed similar characteristics to the pages used (44, 92 and 119) have 138, 208 and 266 words in the passages, the number of sentences on each page ranged from 22 to 30, the average sentence length were 6, 9 and 9 respectively, number of three syllable words ranged from 1 to 2, percentage of hard words was 1, 0.1 and 0.4 respectively, scores generated were 3, 4 and 4. The font size used was 14 and the pictorial illustration for the passages were not in line with the passage. The conclusion is that the passages are not ideal for the learners because they are too simple for learners to read.

With respect to the sixth book used, the Table shows that passages selected were on pages 60, 83 and 124. The number of words used were 158, 190 and 181, the number of sentences in each passage were 18, 21 and 16; the average sentence length in the three passages were 9, 9 and 11 respectively; while the number of words with more than two syllables were 3, 1 and 5 respectively. Furthermore, the percentage of hard words were between 1 and 3, the scores generated were 4, 4 and 6 indicating that two of the passages (pages 60 and 83) were too simple for the learners while the passage on page 124 was

ideal. The font size was 16 and the pictorial illustration were not in line with the passages on pages 60 and 83, but that of page 124 was in line and was ideal with the narration on the passage.

The Table also revealed that characteristics of books 7 and 8 used were not too different from those identified in the books. The major striking resemblance are that the font size used were 12 and the reading score generated were far too high when compared to the other books (14, 12.4, 12.4, 17, 12.4 and 19) respectively. Although, the pictorial illustrations were in line with the passages, the scores signify that the passages used in those books were too hard for the level they are meant for.

### **Discussion**

The study shows the extent to which the selected English reading texts met the requirements of textual characteristics in terms of pictorial illustration, font size, syllables count (mono syllables and multi syllables) and texts in its original form. It reveals that while some of the text books met the requirements of textual characteristics using fog index formular some did not. Majority of the textbooks were either ideal or not too hard, while few of the books were too hard or difficult to read. Specifically, out of the eight textbooks used for the study, six met the requirements using fog index while two did not. This result seems controversial in the sense that some authors followed the rules while some did not. It should be noted that the textbook is a book used as a standard source of information for formal study of a subject and an instrument for teaching and learning (Graves, 2000). Textbooks provide confidence and security for an inexperienced teacher who finds adapting existing textbooks challenging especially for tailored work-related courses. The result supports the idea that children at this level of education should be able to read texts written in English language with ease. This assertion is supported by Pisa (2000) who expatiated that in the process of reading, a proficient reader would always perform three specific comprehension skills namely, retrieving information, interpreting texts and reflecting on texts. This, therefore, involves ability to locate a main idea, facts and drawing inferences on passages.

Also, the result is in consonance with Cullinan (2000) who reported that when a child operates at this reading level, it makes it possible for him or her to read more complex materials and to cope with most materials required of him or her in the school. In support of this, Cameron (2000) said that children are active learners. They learn something by interacting with and adapting to the environment. The more they get interaction in listening, speaking, reading and writing, the more they become literate. Children learn to listen and talk since they were born. They get listening when the mother talks to them and they start developing their language acquisition at home before they enter the school.

The result also shows that some of the picture illustrations in the selected English textbooks were not relevant to the passage. This is contrary to the characteristics of a good and suitable English textbooks for nursery and primary school pupils. A good pre-primary textbook should provide fascinating pictures for the children. Picture books provide children with opportunities to interpret and evaluate texts and also motivate them to read more. This result is in disagreement with the findings of researchers such as Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2007) and Arizpe and Styles (2003) who said that picture books represent a unique visual and literacy art form that engages pupils in many levels of learning and pleasure. The emphasis on the spelling picture book has been a deliberate one. The joining of the words represents the union of the text and art, as the story depends on the interaction of the written text and the image where there has been aesthetic intention by both author and illustrator (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2007; Arizpe and Styles, 2003). Readers respond to each element of the book and can form new meaning from the words or the image or both. What makes picture books so intriguing is that the text and the images usually tell the exact same story (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2007).

In agreement with the above assertion, Mosley (2012) and Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2007) mentioned that another characteristic of a good nursery textbook is the aesthetic impulse, where children can experience the story as if they were there. A good nursery textbook should be well illustrated and engaging children through reading aloud. The write up should be bold to enable the children to read aloud. The illustrations should be drawn correctly, relevant to the situations presented in the reading material (Mosely, 2012). Hence, there must be a link or connection between what is prescribed in the English language curriculum, its implementation and the outcome (Obanya, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

This study determined the textual characteristics of nursery 3 and primary 3 textbooks using fog index requirements in Rivers State, Nigeria. Findings in the study reveal that some of the English reading textbooks for Nursery 3 and Primary 3 actually met the requirements while few did not. It is therefore, recommended that schools should use the textbooks that met the requirements of fog index for their pupils in order to increase their level of readability and performance in English language.

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