

***Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum Implementation in Inclusive Schools**

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History: Received: 21-11-2022 Revised: 14-12-2022 Accepted: 16-12-2022</p> <p>Keyword: Inclusive Schools; Management; <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> Curriculum.</p>	<p>The purpose of this research was to analyze the <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> Curriculum implementation in inclusive schools. The method used in this research was qualitative. Data collection techniques used were observation, interviews with 17 vice principals of academic affairs, and documentation. The analytical method used is data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The results of research showed that from 17 schools in DKI Jakarta, the implementation of <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> Curriculum in inclusive schools has not run optimally, such as special education teachers in inclusive schools were forced to become homeroom teachers, the application of the curriculum was still being segregated with the weight of subjects for students with disabilities being more in special classes than in regular courses, teacher competence regarding inclusive education curricula which was still inadequate, and there was no special education teachers who handled students with special needs in the implementation of <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> Curriculum in inclusive schools.</p>

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an important aspect of building a nation. Good quality education is determined by the curriculum that is used as a reference in learning. Curriculum as the educational direction of a nation has a strategic position by outlining the vision, mission, and goals of education so that it must have valuable content that is conveyed to students (Bahri, 2017). In education, good curriculum management is needed so that it is in line with Indonesia's national education goals.

The curriculum in Indonesia has developed from time to time since the beginning of independence until the last curriculum used as a reference in the implementation of national education is the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum initiated by Nadiem Makarim as Minister of Education, Culture, Research, Technology and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia 2019- 2024 (Ditpsd Kemendikbud, 2022a). Curriculums that change all the time do not just go away, including the transition from K13 to the Emergency Curriculum and *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Based on the results of an interview with one of the teachers

who has a lot of experience, there were obstacles such as syllabus planning, semester programs, annual programs, learning program design, and assessment systems. The obstacle was even worse, they had not finished understanding the curriculum that was in effect at that time but it changed again in the following period due to the change of the Minister of National Education (T, personal communication, March 2022).

The curriculum that continues to experience development until now must be taken by all students of the nation who receive education at school. Inclusive education in Indonesia already has regulations, namely the Minister of National Education Regulation number 70 of 2009 concerning inclusive education. Then it was also strengthened by Jokowi as President of the Republic of Indonesia 2019-2024 through a joint podcast with the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia on National Education Day in 2021 which stated that education in Indonesia must be inclusive. Inclusive education can accommodate all students and guarantee their participation by modifying the existing education system (De Jesus, 2018). Learning in regular classes is carried out jointly between students with special needs and students in general (Lozano et al., 2022). There is no discrimination in learning for students, all students have the right to learn together in schools with a curriculum that can accommodate students' needs.

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in inclusive schools has been researched before. Based on the results of research from Jauhari et al (2022) regarding the optimization of learning materials and media in the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools which has been successfully carried out by obtaining an increase from the average pre-test score of 63.41 to 82.25 in the post-test average score test. This research was conducted by providing training through Virtual Zoom Meetings to teachers in Surabaya in optimizing learning materials, learning media, and assistive technology in the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools. Subsequent research was also conducted by Asfiati & Mahdi (2020) regarding *Merdeka Belajar* for children with special needs at SLB Kumala Indah Padangsidempuan. This research focused more on the zoning system that had to be carried out by each school in accepting new students, minimum ability assessments, and character surveys. The result of their research was that schools supported the *Merdeka Belajar* program from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture by opening a zoning system of 50% on the acceptance of new students. The latest relevant research was conducted by Nursalim (2022) regarding the implications of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy for the implementation of guidance and counseling services. The results of his research showed that the implications of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy were realized in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of guidance and counseling services. Guidance and Counseling teachers had a major role in the success of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum policy.

Based on several previous studies, further research is required that does not only discuss the optimization of learning materials, instructional media and assistive technology through teacher training, assessment, survey on the zoning system, and the implications of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy for the implementation of guidance and counseling services. Further research was also needed that is different from previous studies. Therefore, the present research which aimed to provide suggestions and input from inclusive schools which have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum became necessary to be conducted to

provide insight on how to make improvements so that the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive education in Indonesia could run well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum Management

Management is efforts done by an agency by utilizing its resources including human resources, finance, facilities and infrastructure to achieve the goals set effectively and efficiently (Delis et al., 2022). Management does not mean only to manage the institution. Management must also make the agency able to influence everyone in it (Palmié et al., 2023). When an agency can influence its members, its members will also do the opposite. It can even do its best for the progress of the agency in achieving the goals that have been set.

The curriculum can be said as a set of plans to become a reference for learning in the classroom in the form of documents with several levels of education. This planning is then realized in classroom learning (Glatthorn et al., 2019). In curriculum management, creativity and innovation are needed in utilizing all the talents and potential (Ferreira et al., 2020). Educational stakeholders must be able to explore, see, and develop the talents of all its members as an important component (Altındağ & Aktürk, 2020).

This ability is needed in curriculum management to make the institution more advanced and better. This matter is increasingly more important in inclusive schools that have very diverse backgrounds and student conditions. The diversity of individuals from one as a representation of the culture of each group (Ponomareva et al., 2022), is not easy to make learning interesting and conducive. There needs to be a curriculum that adapts to students who have different backgrounds and individual learning needs. This adaptive curriculum should also be implemented in the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum which is a reference for schools throughout Indonesia.

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

The curriculum has developed over time. Currently the curriculum that applies is the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes in strengthening competence and exploring concepts with sufficient time for students through heterogeneous intra-curricular learning. Teachers can choose freely to use learning tools that suit their interests and learning needs. In addition, there are also projects for students to achieve a *Pancasila* student profile. This project is not tied to subject content to achieve certain targets in learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum was released after the existence of Emergency Curriculum in 2022 as an option for efforts to restore educational conditions from Covid-19. In implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum to utilize information and communication technology (ICT), many platforms have been developed so that they can be used in learning. The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum also involves the learning community, teachers, students, and academics as practice laboratories (Cantika, 2022). The platform that has been created can be accessed for free or paid by students in learning.

Implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum from the types of activities there are intracurricular, extracurricular, and strengthening the profile of *Pancasila* students. This *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum does not affect the teacher's teaching hours because it is

included in the teaching load. In addition, the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is also flexible which provides space for each region to include local content in learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). So, each region does not need to worry about the potential that each has. All can be optimized and empowered with the space that is given openly through this *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.

Curriculum Modification

An inclusive education curriculum can be done in several ways, namely duplication, modification, omission, and substitution (Arriani et al., 2021). These four models can be used to adapt the curriculum used to the background conditions and learning needs of students. So that learning can accommodate all the learning needs of students to achieve the goals that have been set.

The duplication model curriculum is carried out by fully following the curriculum that was in effect at that time without any parts being changed. The curriculum that is applied is the same for all students whether special needs students or students in general (Rusmiyati, 2018). In planning and implementing learning in class, all are treated the same. Starting from materials, facilities and infrastructure, assignments, and projects given by teachers to students including students with special needs. In contrast to the duplication model, this modification model curriculum needs adjustments. The curriculum that is applied to students in general is adapted to the conditions and needs of students with special needs (Dieudé & Prøitz, 2022). In planning and implementing learning, teachers must be able to adjust the curriculum to the conditions and needs of students. So that students get the same rights to carry out their obligations as students to learn as good as possible. This adjustment does not mean special privileges given to certain students, but the fulfillment of equal access for each student as equal access to learning.

Meanwhile, the omission model curriculum is carried out by eliminating parts or all of the curricula that are applied to students in general that are not to the conditions, needs, and potential of students with special needs (Yuwono et al., 2018). Part of the curriculum that has been omitted cannot be carried out by students with their limitations. There is no compensation as a substitute for this part of the curriculum. Contrary to omission, in this substitution model curriculum, if there are parts that do not match the curriculum with the conditions, needs, and potential of students with special needs, they can be replaced with other appropriate program (Rohmadi, 2016). Several models in the curriculum must be managed properly so that students' needs can be accommodated in inclusive schools.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an educational service that accommodates the needs of students with different backgrounds and guarantees their participation in learning together in regular classes. The diversity that exists in inclusive education comes from various aspects, starting from social, ethnic, economic, language, cultural aspects, to the specifics of their disabilities. Everyone gets the same rights from schools and educational institutions to learn (De Jesus, 2018).

Complementing this opinion, Love & Horn (2021) also suggest that inclusive education does not only depend on location, but also focuses on individual learning, available support, and social opportunities. Individual learner must be accommodated with

all their needs based on their potential, talent, and specific disabilities. Social interaction between students should not be discriminatory and must get support through conditioning. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) a world institution under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) expressed its view of inclusive education as an education system that accepts all students to obtain learning. The diversity of backgrounds of students must ensure that the curriculum, facilities and infrastructure, and everything that supports learning can be used by students at various levels of education. All students have the same right to study together at the same school (UNICEF, 2017).

METHOD

This study used a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. As mentioned by Creswell (2014), in qualitative research, researchers seek the answer from phenomena from the perspective of participants. This research was conducted in schools in DKI Jakarta. The primary data in this study were the results of interviews from 17 schools in various levels of education by having five of Islamic schools, namely, SMK Islam Fatahillah Jakarta, SDIT Nurul Yaqin, SDIT Al Huda Kelapa Gading, MI Istiqlal Jakarta, and Amanah Bunda Tahfidz Shool with respondents from each school who were appointed directly by the principal, namely the vice principals for academic and curriculum affairs, homeroom teachers, and Special Education Teachers. While secondary data collections were collected by using observations and documentations. Observations were made by observing the 17 schools where the research took place, then interpreted the results of these observations. Interviews were conducted with vice principals for academic and curriculum matters, class teachers, and Special Education teachers as respondents who were appointed directly by the school principal. The documentations were collected from digital and non-digital data archives in the form of school and curriculum databases which include syllabus, Learning Program Design, student identification and assessment results, Individual Learning Program, and teaching materials. While the data analysis technique in three activities, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was utilized. Data reduction was carried out by processing and selecting data generated from observations, interviews, and documentation. Data presentation was carried out by explaining the results of data reduction with diagrams and pictures using the <https://app.diagrams.net/> platform, and writing the report. And finally, the conclusions were presented at the end of the article.

FINDINGS

Inclusive Education in DKI Jakarta

Documentation on inclusive education conducted by schools that already implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in DKI Jakarta was carried out by visiting the website of <https://dapo.kemdikbud.go.id/sp> regarding school data in Indonesia and the website of <https://kurikulum.gtk.kemdikbud.go.id/> regarding data on schools that have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. The following are the results of the data collection:

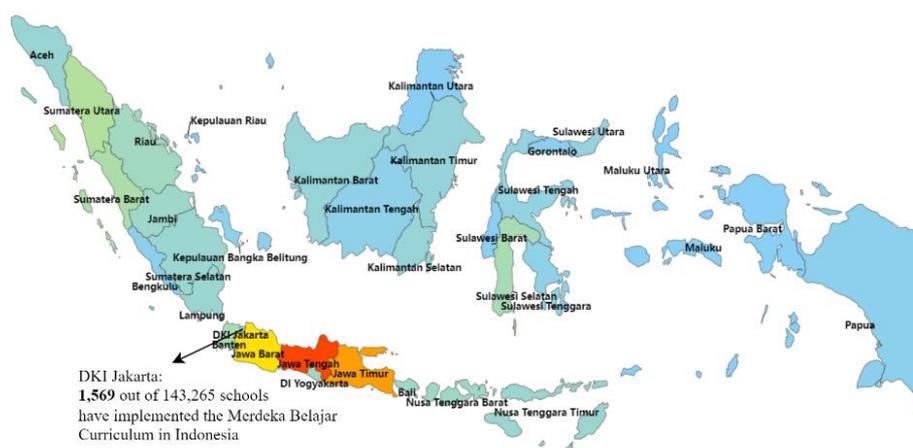


Figure 1. Schools implementing *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Jakarta

Based on the results of the data collection. 143,265 schools have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum from 438,805 schools throughout Indonesia. Meanwhile, 1,569 out of 8,801 schools in DKI Jakarta have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum with various levels of education. Based on observations and interviews with 17 schools, 14 schools have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum and have implemented inclusive education. While 3 other schools have not implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum due to a lack of outreach and training regarding the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, limited human resources, and a lack of facilities and infrastructure that support learning.

It was also found that there were schools that stated that their schools were not included in the schools that held inclusive education, but there were students who were categorized as students with special needs. There was a sub-optimal implementation of inclusive education in schools in DKI Jakarta which was still inadequate in terms of learning facilities and infrastructure and in terms of human resources, such as Special Education teachers who should come from the Special Education study program who possessed the knowledge and skills in providing education and development services for students with special needs.

However, in other findings, it was found that there were 2 schools out of the 17 schools studied that turned Special Education teachers into homeroom teachers. Special Education Teachers who were supposed to be learning information centers for homeroom teachers about students with special needs turned into homeroom teachers whose only function was to manage learning in class. So that the management of learning in inclusive schools has not run optimally because there was no learning information center regarding inclusive education.

Barriers to the Implementation of Inclusive Education

From several respondents interviewed and direct observations at school, it was found several obstacles in the implementation of inclusive education in DKI Jakarta. They are:

1. Inadequate learning facilities at the school

At least 3 respondents who stated that the obstacles that arise in the implementation of inclusive education were related to inadequate learning support facilities and infrastructure, especially for students with special needs. Children with special needs

were grouped according to the types of special needs found. Not all schools were able to provide the facilities as needed. This was the limitation of schools providing learning facilities according to the types of children with special needs.

2. Lack of teachers' knowledge in conducting teaching for students with special needs
Teachers experienced difficulties in managing learning in the classroom with learning differentiation, which requires inclusive schools to be able to present a variety or variety of different learning models and learning media according to the needs of students in general and special needs students. Differentiation of learning that has been carried out so far, apart from experiencing difficulties, was still not adaptive according to the specifics of disabilities.
3. Lack of understanding regarding inclusiveness from school members
It was also found that there was a detailed and comprehensive lack of understanding regarding inclusiveness from teachers, education staff, and students. It was also found that the implementation of inclusive education in 17 schools, the majority of schools did not have a Special Education teacher to inform them for inclusive school learning, this became an obstacle for special needs students in inclusive schools in receiving education.

Implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Inclusive Schools

It was found that there was the unpreparedness of inclusive schools in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum for various reasons. These included the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum materials obtained were still not appropriate with an adaptive inclusive education curriculum and there was no curriculum adjustment in the form of modification, duplication, substitution, and omission according to the needs of students, including students with special needs. Based on the interview with some respondents, it was caused by a lack of information and knowledge from the teachers about adaptive inclusive education curriculum.

It was also found that there was a mismatch of needs in the learning process, such as the absence of Special Education teachers who could give information in inclusive schools, learning media that were not suitable for students with special needs, and teachers who had difficulties in making learning differentiation based on learning styles and interests for students in general and special needs students. Next, there was still a lack of interest and interest in students participating in 5P activities or the Project for Strengthening *Pancasila* Student Profiles. Another finding was the minimal practice of curriculum modification by teachers toward students with special needs. On the other hand, it was found that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools could also facilitate the learning process for teachers because it was easier or practical to use, and teachers had the right and authority to develop learning curricula adapting their needs and educational facilities for students in general and students with special needs, and also the distribution of time equally in the learning process so that the students would not get bored easily.

DISCUSSION

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum was released on February 11 2022 online by Nadiem Makarim as Minister of Education, Culture, Research, Technology, and Higher

Education of the Republic of Indonesia (Mendikbudristek RI). This curriculum still referred to the K13 curriculum. It was just even more simplified from the Emergency Curriculum issued during the Covid-19 pandemic (Ditpsd Kemendikbud, 2022a). The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum aimed to improve the quality of learning that focused on essential material and developing student character which is called the *Pancasila* Student Profile. The *Pancasila* Student Profile was designed to observe and think about solutions to environmental problems in accordance with *Pancasila* values (Ditpsd Kemendikbud, 2022b).

Based on the result of documentation, after the launch of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture stated that schools implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in the 2022/2023 school year reached 143,265 schools in Indonesia. Based on data on the number of schools released by Dapodik Kemendikbud RI (2022) there were a total of 438,805 schools at the national level and as many as 8,801 schools at DKI Jakarta. Meanwhile, schools in DKI Jakarta Province that have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum have reached 1,569 schools with various levels of education (GTK Kemendikbudristek RI, 2022). So, in terms of percentage, it has reached 32.65% at the national level and 17.8% in DKI Jakarta Province. Thus, the percentage of schools that have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum was higher at the national level than DKI Jakarta. In fact, in terms of facilities, training for teachers, and access to school information in DKI Jakarta were quite adequate.

Implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in schools was not an easy endeavor and able to be quickly implemented in all schools, but there needed to be a common perception between policymakers and the executors. Even though the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum has been released after the Emergency Curriculum was implemented in 2022, in reality in DKI Jakarta not all schools could implement the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Therefore, it seems necessary to have a discussion space, both online and offline from various parties, not only from the government sector but also from the private sector which must contribute to the success of this *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum policy. As stated by Cantika (Cantika, 2022) that in the success of the Independent Curriculum policy it is necessary to involve the learning community, teachers, students, and academics as practice laboratories for the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Collaboration is the key to success in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools.

Regarding the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Inclusive Schools, there were 3 out of 17 schools studied stated that they had not implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum and implemented inclusive education, this was due to the lack of socialization and training for the schools. It was noted that the three schools needed firmness to immediately implement inclusive education according to the Regulation of the Governor of DKI Jakarta number 40 of 2021 and Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 70 of 2009 regarding the implementation of inclusive education.

The existence of learning in inclusive schools that apply the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum must fulfil the needs of students, especially students with special needs. This was reinforced by research conducted by Knight and Crick (2022) which mentioned that the learning process carried out by the school must be by the needs of students through adaptive curriculum content by the potential, talents and special needs of students. Based on the results of interview, it turned out that teachers in inclusive schools were still having difficulty modifying the curriculum so there were also difficulties in learning differentiation based on

learning styles, interests, and, the specificity of disabilities. Learning differentiation should be done with adaptive learning through the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum content. It was in line with Arriani et al. (Arriani et al., 2021) who suggested that four curriculum modifications can be made, namely duplication, modification, omission, and substitution. The duplication model curriculum was carried out by fully following the curriculum that was in effect at that time without any parts being changed (Rusmiyati, 2018). The modified model curriculum is carried out by adjusting the curriculum content and student learning needs (Dieudé & Prøitz, 2022). The omission model curriculum is carried out by eliminating parts or all of the curricula that are applied to students in general that are not to the conditions, needs, and potential of students with special needs (Yuwono et al., 2018). In substitution model curriculum, if there are parts of the curriculum that are not in line with the conditions, needs, and potential of students with special needs, it can be replaced with other appropriate program (Rohmadi, 2016). Teachers can choose the right model, according to learning styles, interests, and specific disabilities.

Difficulties in learning differentiation had an impact on the learning process for students, especially students with special needs. Therefore, there was a need for more in-depth training and outreach to schools, especially class teachers. This training will certainly increase the knowledge and skills of teachers in dealing with inclusive education. Academic training on disability and inclusive education can increase the capacity of teachers to implement the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools.

Furthermore, it was revealed that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools has not run optimally in terms of learning facilities or media, where there was no special learning media for students with special needs. This should be an evaluation and improvement in the future, to realize the goals of inclusive education, which is to serve education for all people. Like research conducted by De Jesus (De Jesus, 2018) that suggested that all students get the same rights from schools and educational institutions to learn. Accessibility in obtaining learning for every general student and student with special needs must be met.

Difficulties in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools suggested a note for immediate improvement. Even though there were a Regulation of the Governor of DKI Jakarta number 40 of 2021 and a Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 70 of 2009 regarding the implementation of inclusive education, it was still found out that Special Education teachers have instead switched to become homeroom teachers due to a shortage of homeroom teachers. On the contrary, in other schools, it was found that the schools did not have Special Education teachers and academic staff who could handle students with special needs. Existing facilities and infrastructure which did not support learning, especially learning media in inclusive schools which were still very limited for students with special needs. Furthermore, there were schools that did not understand the implementation of inclusive education, eventhought they had students categorized as students with special needs in their schools. *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum management in inclusive schools also still applied the curriculum in segregated schools or special schools. There was too much subject weight for students with special needs in special classes compared to regular classes. This problem could also be overcome by procuring Special Education teachers to give information for inclusive school learning. This was in line with the research conducted by Aldabas (2020) which stated that

the majority of Special Education teachers out of 382 teachers in Saudi Arabia were ready to provide inclusive classroom learning for students with special needs. The readiness of Special Education teachers was very good and they could even provide learning for students with special needs in the severe category in inclusive classes. Special Education teachers can also provide education for other homeroom teachers in making adaptive learning media and curriculum content adjustments in inclusive schools according to learning styles, interests, and specific disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools was still not running optimally due to several things including the lack of training and outreach regarding the adaptive *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools, the lack of accessible school facilities, and human resources in inclusive schools. These notes need to be paid attention immediately from the policymakers so that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools can be felt by all members of the academic community. Recommendations for further research can be carried out by holding training and socialization of adaptive *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools. Adaptive curriculum in the form of duplication, modification, omission, and substitution. This training and socialization can increase the capacity of teachers in implementing an adaptive *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in inclusive schools according to learning styles, interests, and specification of disabilities.

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