THE ROLE OF SUPERVISORS AND SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE IN RESEARCH WORK

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A paper presented at workshop on Postgraduate Students' Research Supervision organized by the Postgraduate School, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria held at Assembly Hall, A.B.U. on 21 - 22ND July 2005,

Abstract

The paper examined the essence of research and its place especially in academic environment and in the society at large. The role of supervisors and supervisory committee to ensure **a** successful conduct of research as well as writing and presentation of research report were highlighted. It concludes that the success or otherwise of conducting and writing a standard and qualitative academic research report will largely be a function of the type of relationship that exists between the supervisors and - supervisees.

Introduction

Traditionally, one of the requirements for the award of academic degree certificate at all levels of university education programmes worldwide is the successful completion of an academic research work. The research report is usually presented or submitted to the

university in form of project, thesis and dissertation. Depending on the type of degree programme, such research reports may or may not be defended before a panel of internal and external examiners.

Essentially, the essence of the academic research work embarked upon by the postgraduate students and indeed the undergraduate students is to advance the frontiers of knowledge in their respective areas of specialization. It is also to bring about positive changes, improvements and advances in the lots of mankind and in the society in general; especially through the application of the knowledge, experience and ideas acquired as by-product of the research. In effect therefore, the postgraduate students are expected and should be encouraged to conduct researches useful for the enhancement of the socio-economic, political, scientific and cultural well being of their immediate and remote environments, society and the world at large.

However, it is also important that researches carried out by postgraduate students and indeed the undergraduates are topical and relevant to the prevailing circumstances and phenomena of the moment. They should have more direct bearing and impact on our immediate environment conceptualized from either theoretical or realistic backgrounds and predispositions. A research work is said to be theoretical based when it attempts to identify and describe some expectations or develop some hypotheses that could lead to the discovery and perhaps shaping the world of reality. Whereas, a research work is said to be realistically based when it attempts to discover the phenomena that do really exist in our environment, society or world which hitherto were at best imagined but not discovered.

A student and indeed a typical researcher is said to have successfully completed a research work when:

- it is based on acceptable scientific research procedure – ranging from the choice of topic. review of related literature, to method of data collection. analysis. presentation and interpretation of research results and report writing.
- it attempts to find solution to identified problems or gaps needed to be filled
- it can successfully be replicated and tested by other researchers especially in similar given environments elsewhere refute to or confirm or dispute the findings.
- it is based on observable and empirical scientific evidence and also on accurate observations, analysis and descriptions
- it can facilitate predictions of future events and phenomena especially through development of generalizations, principles, theories and strategies.
- it is based on research ethics such as objectivity; integrity of the researcher; right to privacy, security, confidentiality; reliability and dignity of information sources/informant; non distortion and misrepresentation of facts; and presentation of research findings/reports in an acceptable format and manner
- it is not based on any form of plagiarism, pretense and deliberate manipulations

Hence, depending upon the policy and tradition of the university, faculty or department, a majority of academic research projects, especially at the graduate levels, are oral y examined or defended successfully by the students before a legally constituted body of internal and external examiners to determine the extent of the students', experiences,

capacity, ability, proficiency, and knowledge in the chosen area of specialization and in the research conducted before the award of the degree in view.

Nevertheless, whatever is the policy or tradition adopted by an academic institution/establishment, an academic research work or project must comply with at least some basic scientific enquiry methods and procedures to make it acceptable in an academic community or environment. Such expectations include:

i. Identification of the title or topic of research and the problem(s) it is to address
ii. Definition of the problem(s) and determination of its extent or scope
iii. Identification and analysis of relevant and most especially previous and c urrent experiences and ideas related to the area of research so as to determine one of the most viable lines of action
iv. Identification and determination of the relevant strategies for gathering/acquiring and analyzing the most relevant data and information necessary for finding solutions to the problems hitherto identified and analyses
v. Analysis of the generated or collected data and information, discussions and making inferences and deductions from the findings of the study; and
vi. Making conclusions from the findings of the study as well as propositions on the perceived viable way forward

The above expectations presuppose that, the successful completion of the students' academic research work will largely depend upon the supervisors' and supervisory committee's competence and familiarity with the current trends in the methodology of conducting research on the one hand, and the extent of understanding and coopeation among the members of the supervisory committee to effectively collaborate in the

supervision exercise on the other hand. They need to be up -- to - date with the current literature and advances, particularly in their respective areas of specialization and serve as the students' guide, motivator, leader, supporters, and face - savers. The students' research project supervisors and supervisory committee need to be *mindful* of the fact that their intellectual capacity, capability, competence and integrity is equally put to test whenever their students' research work are subjected to any form of examination or scrutiny. Indeed the glory of a qualitative student academic research work otherwise is usually shared in between the supervisor and supervisee.

THE EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS' RESEARCH SUPERVISORS AND SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

There is no doubt in the fact that the supervisors and supervisory committee of students conducting academic research particularly at the postgraduate level have to evolve all means and strategies to ensure that the supervisees do not only succeed in the research project but produce qualitative work that could stand the test of time. Therefore, in order to provide an academic leadership and control necessary for proper supervision of students' academic research work, the supervisors need to be familiar and conversant with the fundamental research terminologies, concepts, techniques, procedures and methodologies. Also, they should be seen to be playing at least the basic roles of advisers, guidance and counselors, motivators, supporters, protectors, defenders, and promoters of the students they have supervised. Above all, there should be unison and maintenance of common grounds among the supervisory committee members on the supervision exercise based on objectivity, fairness, sincerity and empathy.

A research student should be seen by the supervisor(s) and supervisory committee as a client who really needs help and assistance to succeed as he/she has taken

the courage to seek for knowledge through research, and is committed to undergo all the rigors or learning experiences involved, is ready to face all the challenges, threats, and excitements associated with the research; and has the capacity, ability and resilience for self actualization.

In the light of the above, it is very important and essential that the supervisors and the supervisory committees for research students are seen as helpers, facilitators, therapists: models, motivators and benefactors of the research students assigned to them to supervise. Characteristically, they are suppose to be sociable, intelligent, accommodative, approachable, empathic, cooperative, enterprising, rational, sincere, fair, stable, objective, calm, initiative, receptive, practical, broadminded and very much interested in the progress of the research work of the students being supervised to succeed a least cost and within the specified time frame of studentship. Above all, they should be receptive to the communication ability and capacity of the research student and also provide an enabling environment and opportunities to understand the communication processes and channels of each other verbally and in writing empathetically.

Fundamentally, the role of the supervisors and the supervisory committee in ensuring that the research students assigned to them to supervise succeed and produce qualitative research report include:

i. Determination of the title/topic of the research and identification of the problems involved

One of the first assistance a supervisor and supervisory committee is expected to render to the researcher is shaping of the title/topic of research. This usually involves mutual discussion between the supervisor and the supervisee with the view to identifying

the focus of the research and what it is attempting to address either from theoretical or realistical (practical) perspectives. At this junction, the supervisor's knowledge of the types of research becomes very relevant.

By and large, research could be grouped into basic and applied. A research is considered as basic when it attempts to discover the facts surrounding a given circumstance or phenomenon with the view to identifying what is really the situation of things. On the other hand, a research is said to be applied (explanatory) when it attempts to investigate why things are what they are (based on the premise that problems do exist) with the view to identifying what should be done about it. The supervisor's ability to identify what type of research the student intends to engage in will assist in identifying its focus and what relevant problems it should obviously address and consequently, what should the title/topic read.

ii Definition of the research problems and determination of its extent/scope

A detailed discourse on the accepted topic or title of research between the supervisor and the researcher is useful in analyzing the problem at sight and what type of research questions should be put forward. In effect therefore, the statement of problem of the study, which is usually a scenario building strategy to marshal out the perceived problems of the – state – of – the art in focus derivable from introduction or background of the study, forms the foundation upon which the research questions, objectives hypotheses of the study; including justification of the study are highlighted. Indeed there should be positive and direct relationship among the statement of the problem of the study, the research questions and objectives or purpose of the study, hypotheses, and justification for conducting the research. However, the statement of the justification of

the study should be seen as being more of the perceived utility of the findings of the study in realistic terms.

iii. Identification and analysis of the relevant previous and current experiences and ideas

It is often said that 'there is no smoke without fire.' Therefore, it is generally believed that positive or negative experiences and ideas acquired or perceived by individuals are the prime motivators to conducing research of any sort. Hence, it is important for the researchers to acquaint themselves with the relevant past as well as current experiences and ideas related to their areas of study with the view to:

a) avoiding repetition of previous lapses experienced by others;

b) making room for breaking new grounds and advances in frontiers of knowledge;

c) justifying actions and steps taken in the conduct of the research

d) corroborating the findings of the current research with those of other similar types of researches especially on the same type of phenomenon conducted in different environment; and

e) identifying the state of – the – art of things in the areas of the research; etc.

The supervisor and the supervisory committee need to encourage and support the researcher to has to rely on both current and retrospective literature so as to be acquainted with the said previous and current experiences and ideas likely to be useful to him/her in the course of the research. Hence, the supervisors and the supervisory committee should:

a) endeavour to assist the researcher synthesize the most relevant literature to use and cite;

b) advise on where to get access to the relevant literature needed easily, especially from institution, libraries and information centres;

c) where feasible: assist to provide the researcher with the said literature from personal collections, and from collection of friends, colleagues and associates;

d) assist the researcher secure relevant literature from within and outside the country including via Internet, etc.

iv Identification and determination of requisite strategies and skills for conducting research and for data and information collection, analysis, discussion and interpretation and presentation

The supervisor's knowledge of research designs and methods of conducting research is very crucial in advising the researcher on what to do to meet up to the above expectation. The supervisor and supervisory committee therefore, need to be conversant and also familiar with the intricacies of research methods such as: Experimental, Exploratory; Historical; Survey; Case or Clinical studies; Inferential; Descriptive; Ex-post facto researches, etc.

For instance, a research is said to be experimental when it attempts to identify the cause – and – effect relationships, reactions or effects of some treatments given to a set of two or more group members of samples of a given population of study. This is done especially when one set of the samples is controlled during the course of the treatment. There could be instances when none of the sets of the samples would be controlled. On the other hand, a research could be considered as survey when it focuses on a given population of a phenomenon where it collects and analyses the data and information gathered from a sample of the said population considered to be massive to deal with intensively as a whole. Usually, the findings of this type of study are used to generalize

on the entire population under investigation. Also, a research is said to be systematic or empirical study or rather, Ex-post facto if it deals with a phenomenon that already exists and/or an issue or event that has taken place. In this case, the researcher may not necessarily have to control or manipulate any of the variables or subjects of study. But rather, he/she will create an enabling environment for data collection and analysis.

The knowledge of research design, perceived as a useful outline, guide or scheme for facilitating the researcher's effort to generate and gather the requisite data and information for answering the research questions and testing the hypotheses of the study, is necessary for the supervisor, the supervisory committee and the researcher. This helps in identifying the sources and type of data and information (primary or secondary) required, as well as show how and what treatments the subjects and variables of the study would receive to facilitate the generation of the needed data and information. It also includes the most appropriate type of research design to adopt.

Generally, research designs could be classified into three types. These are: experimental, survey and ex-post facto.

1. Research design is said to be experimental when it attempts to gather data and information on cause – and – effect relationship between two or among more sets of samples of a given population where one of the sets receives a given treatment (uncontrolled) and the other (controlled) does not. This is applicable to:

   a) pure experimental research designs which characteristically have randomized subjects and the application of the given treatment on the controlled groups does not occur by mere chance, and

b) quasi-experimental designs which usually have no variations or controlled group. But rather, they are compared by themselves.

2. Research design is said to be survey design if it has no control group. What is more important is to gather the required data and information from the observations of the sample of the given population devoid of any manipulation of cause – and – effect relationship. The survey design could be cross – sectional when the samples of the study are observed at the same period of time in different locations or longitudinal when the samples are observed for data and information collection at given intervals of time.

3. However, an Ex-post factor research design, also referred to as single – case design, aims at gathering data and information from already occurred events or easting phenomenon in forms of evaluative study rather than experimental or survey.

At this juncture therefore, the supervisors and supervisory committee need to assist the researcher in determining the population of the study. It is usually comprised of all conceivable objects, subjects, elements or members of variables that constitute the phenomenon under study. A population could be finite or infinite depending on the area of focus of the study. Similarly, the researcher should be assisted to determine the sample of the population under investigation especially if such population is so massive in size and content to be studied in its entirety as a whole and in greater detail within the time frame scheduled for the study. The sample, which is literarily a subset, a representative or a part of the population of study, is usually studied in the above circumstance so that the outcome of the finding is used to generalize on the population.

In addition, the researcher needs to be educated and assisted on the methodology and technique of choosing the members and size of the sample of the study. The

researcher's knowledge of sampling designs will help in determining which sampling method and technique to adopt in drawing the membership of the sample. For instance, when the researcher adopts a probability sampling method (also referred to as random or strategic sampling), the members of the sample would be drawn using say, random, systematic, and stratified or area/cluster sampling method. However, when the researcher adopts the non- probability sampling method (also referred to as purposive, non-random, and non-strategic sampling method), the members of the sample would be chosen using, say, quota system; 'self' judgment, or appraisal, panel or permanent; double or multistage, accidental or convenience sampling method.

It is therefore necessary that researchers are encouraged to improve the quality of the data and information gathered for their research through validation of the instruments of data collection (construct validity) and testing the reliability of the data and information analyzed (content validity) to determine whether they would be able to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses of the research.

The instruments for data collection is said to be valid when it is able to produce correct responses from the subjects of the sample of the study. This expectation also applies to research designs and measuring instruments.

The validation of research designs can be viewed as an attempt and effort to determine its adequacy with respect to its ability to produce or generate the type of responses expected to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses:

a) internally (internal validity) through confirmation of the generation of the needed responses from the research design and/or

b) externally (external validity) through confirmation of the representativeness of the subjects of study especially where experimentation is to take place and subjects are expected to react positively or negatively to the eternal factors.

The measuring instruments of research are said to be valid when they are able to measure what they are actually expected to measure. This can be conceived from the perspectives of validating:

a) the content (content validity) to determine the adequacy of the coverage of the scope of the topic of research as highlighted by the research questions and hypotheses;
b) the criteria, concepts and variables of the study (criterion related validity) to judge the concurrent capacity and predictive ability of the instruments in relation to the existing validated instruments of measurement or established criteria, concepts and variables. The researcher therefore, is expected to be assisted to determine the relevant criteria to be measured or compared with the new instruments;
c) construct (construct validity) to measure the adequacy of the instruments used in measuring the intended meaning of the concept as expressed by the data on the information collected.

It is also important that the stability, accuracy, precision and consistency of the instruments of measurement of data and information collected are tested to determine their reliability. This is especially in terms of how they are able to consistently produce and generate similar results of independent study of the same or similar phenomenon with same predispositions. Therefore, an instrument could be said to be reliable when it

is able to repeatedly produce similar or same results from the independent studies of same phenomenon at different times and locations under the same conditions and assumptions.

The reliability of measuring instruments for data and information collection can be tested using multiple forms of tests whereby the same measuring instrument is administered on the same variable in different dimensions to determine the equivalent or level of association among the forms. It could also be through test – re test method whereby the measuring instrument is administered on, say, two sets of the members of a population or sample at different times to determine the level of correlation between the two measurements. However, the most popular method is the 'split – half' technique whereby the measurement items are randomly split into two halves so that each half is treated as an alternative form of the same measurement to determine the reliability coefficient of the treatment using the formula rtt = 1 – ve/vt

Where rtt = reliability coefficient, ve = expected variance between measurements of the forms and vt = total variance between measures of the forms.

v. Analysis of data and interpretation of findings

More often than not, data generated from research instruments such as questionnaires and measurement scales provide quantitative information that need to be manipulated in various forms using, say, relevant statistical methods and techniques to identify and determine the needed trends and patterns of relationships or associations among the manipulated data and information. Therefore, in preparing the data for analysis, the researcher needs to be educated on the importance of editing the data (field editing) to remove possible errors that could cause inconsistencies of responses that

might lead to problems of analysis and interpretation of the results. Experience has shown that errors could occur during data gathering exercise, especially when information/responses to identified missing gaps collected from interviews, discussions and observations were not recorded accordingly. Other errors such as numeric, transposition, inappropriate response to questions and omissions should also be checked (central editing) to ensure consistency, authenticity and correctness of information and data gathered. It is therefore the responsibility of the supervisors and supervisory committee to ensure that data collected were edited before analysis.

The researcher should be enlightened to realize that data analysis could be made easy especially when questions and possible responses to them are grouped into like terms, categories, or classes with each response given unique numeral or symbol for easy identification and recognition. It is important that the supervisors and supervisory committee encourage the researcher to codify instruments for gathering data such as the questionnaires before they are administered. This saves the researcher's time in inputting responses for analysis whether through manual or automated means. Data analysis is further made easy when possible tables (dummy tables) to be used are tentatively constructed manually or automatically to allow the researcher picture the possible relationships of the key variables under investigation.

Therefore, the supervisor's and supervisory committee's knowledge of statistical methods and techniques is necessary to assist the researcher appreciate and adopt the appropriate statistical method to use for data analysis including tests of hypotheses. The researcher should know, for example, the difference between descriptive and inferential statistics. Statistics is said to be descriptive when it brings some order into the data in

form of, tabulation, summarization, measurement of central tendency and dispersion, etc. And, statistics is said to be inferential when it allows the researcher to infer or draw valid conclusions from the statistical analysis of central tendency and dispersion: estimate the parameter of a population; predict the characteristics of a population; and draw conclusions from the result of the hypothesis tested.

However, it should be noted that inferential statistics could be either parametric or nonparametric. Statistical test is said to be parametric when it is a probabilistic test of significance or it is based on student t – test or distribution, correlation analysis, regression analysis or an analysis of variance (ANOVA). Parametric tests are usually based on normal distribution used in probability distributions or any life phenomenon with variables known to be normally distributed with mean and standard deviation(s).

On the other hand, an inferential statistical test is said to be non-parametric when it can be validated under general statistical assumptions. They are considered to be distribution – free statistics because the distribution of the variables is usually inconsequential and unconcerned with the parameters of the population. This type of statistical method is also used in situations where the assumptions of the normal distribution characteristics are unsustained and where the data for analysis are generated through nominal and ordinal scales of measurements. It is however possible that the non – parametric statistical test is applied to both the normal and seemingly normal (skewed) distributions. The commonly used non parametric statistics in theses and dissertations include Spearman Rank Order Correlation, Chi – Square tests, etc.

Hence, the researcher requires the advice of the supervisors and supervisory committee in constructing statements of hypotheses for the study right from the on – set.

This is necessary especially if the research questions call for them. A statement of hypothesis is usually considered as an advanced prediction, postulation, or assertion of the likely outcome of the findings of a study on a given phenomenon in real terms when the data gathered are analyzed, especially statistically under a given situation. It tends to serve as a veritable linkage between the statements of prepositions or hypothesis (theory) and the outcome of the result of the hypothesis tested (reality).

Generally, a statement of hypothesis has at least two or more variables to compare or test their relationships or differences under a defined existing or anticipated relationship or differences between or among them in negative (Ho) or positive (H_1) formation. There are however some instances where a variable is involved and it is tested or measured under two conditions or in two same groups. Thus, the acceptance or rejection of the result of the hypothesis tested is usually anchored at a given level of degree of significance of difference of the relationships (quantitative assessment) or variation in the kind of relationships (qualitative assessment) of the variables under investigation. In some cases, quantitative assessment of the relationship between or among the variables under study could be in form of cause and effect treatment and outcome or effect on the variables.

Therefore, in the light of the above, especially where decisions or conclusions have to be made based on the outcome of the test of the hypothesis, the researcher needs the assistance of the supervisor especially in:

a. identifying possible variables in the hypothesis,

b. determine whether the hypothesis is a correlational, predictive or dependency study

c. define the mode of the variations in the variables (i.e. degree of difference or level of variability),

d. specify how the variables (x and y) should relate to each other, and

e. identify the type of research design that would be useful in gathering the required data and information for the variables under study. The supervisor's assistance in this regard is very necessary because variables could differ in degree of significance, or vary from one kind to the other. Similarly, differences inv variables of study could be indirect or inverse relationships.

A hypothesis is said to be in null form (Ho) when it is stated in negative perspective using the words, slay, 'No' or 'Not'. For example, "There is no significant difference or relationship between.....and.....". "It is not all the .....that will.....". The outcome of the test is either rejected or accepted at a defined level of degree of significance of difference or relationship and degree of freedom (DF). However, a hypothesis is said to be in alternative form (H1 when it is stated in positive perspectives or assertions starting with the word, "There is.....". "The smaller.....the less....." This is as against the Ho which usually starts with "There is no .....".

By and large, the Ho tends to have an inverse relationship with H_1 such that whenever the result of the tested Ho is rejected, the H_1 is automatically accepted and vice versa. It has been discovered that it is the Ho that is usually subjected to tests to find out the relationship between or among the variables of study. However, as to the decision on whether a researcher accepts or rejects the outcome of the hypothesis tested, a type II

error could be committed when Ho is rejected when it should be accepted. And a Type I Error could be committed when it is in reverse situation. Therefore, the supervisor and supervisory committee have a great role to play at the decision stage when Ho has to be accepted or rejected.

Hypothesis could be a research hypothesis or statistical hypothesis stated in directional (one sided) or non-directional (two sided) way. Research hypothesis, which is more or less like research question written in comparative form is usually based on assumptions and predictions of some relationships between or among the variables under investigation. However, statistical hypothesis mostly deal with statistical tests of the predicted relationships of the variables of a phenomenon under investigation stated in negative (Ho) or positive (H_1) formation. Unlike the statistical hypothesis, the research hypothesis has no Ho and H_1.

Summarization of findings, making conclusions and proposing recommendations and suggestions

The supervisors and supervisory committee need to assist the researcher prepare a summary of the important issues raised in the write-up especially within the first 4 chapters (i.e. summary of the study) as well as the major findings of the study (i.e. summary of findings). It is advisable that the summary reflects both the research questions and the outcome of the hypotheses tested. The idea is that such summary should serve to portray what the research is all about, how it was carried out and the extent of the coverage as reflected by the findings. When properly articulated and presented it could meet the immediate information needs of the would-be readers;

assessors; motivate further reading of the entire work: or undertake further investigations in the area of study.

The researcher needs to be guided in drawing the conclusions of the study. Conclusions are better written when they are seen as deductions, conceptions, inferences, perceptions or simply the basic implications of the outcome of the investigation derived from the findings of the study. There should be positive correlation between the conclusions drawn and the findings of the study. Therefore, a quick recollection or rejection of the major issues raised or identified at the literature review and data analysis and interpretation stages will help a great deal.

The researcher should be made to be aware that recommendations and suggestions proposed are practically – oriented and directly related to the findings of the study. Other recommendations which are relevant but not directly related to the findings of the study could be treated under other recommendations and suggestions. It is also important that the researcher identifies areas for further research so as to take care of some of the obvious shortcomings of the research as a result of the limitations faced by the researcher.

Preparation of Reference and Bibliographic Citations

Reference and bibliographic citations should be seen by the researcher as integral part of research report. Apart from their main importance which includes providing authority to the work, they serve as channels through which interested readers could gain access to more information on the subject under consideration.

Normally, reference citations should be provided at the end of each chapter of the research report while the bibliography, which is a summation of all the references cited in

the report/work. should be provided at the end of the entire work or report. By and large. the difference between the two is that, while reference citation provides such information as: name of author/editor/compiler; the title of the work and edition (if any); place and date of publication; publishers; year of publication and pagination, the bibliographic citation provides all the aforementioned information contained in reference citations with the exception of pagination.

Thus, it is the responsibility of the supervisors and supervisory committee to guide the researcher on the style of citation to adopt consistently in both the reference and bibliographic citations. Some of the popular citation styles adopted in research reports include the American Psychological Association (APA) style. Association of Modern Linguistic (AMC) style and Kate Turabian (Chicago) style. It is however important that whichever style is adopted by the researcher must conform with that acceptable to the institution awarding the degree in view as well as with the internationally accepted standards and styles.

Conclusion

The paper has highlighted the essence of conducting research particularly the academic research work. It posits that, the success or otherwise in ensuring that the researcher successfully conducts and produces a standard and qualitative research work largely depends upon the extent of the cooperation that exists between the researcher and the supervisors; how both the supervisor and the supervisee are willing and ready to tolerate each others' shortcomings; the level of understanding and cooperation among the

supervisors or members of the supervisory committee; and how the supervisors are willing, capable, and ready to become a role model to the researcher.

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