



Integrating Experiential Learning In Activating Socio-Emotional Competency (Self-Awareness) In Students: A School-Based Action Research

Dr. D. Nagaraja Kumari^{1*}, G. V. Himaheswara Rao²

^{1*}Associate Professor & Chairperson BoS in Education ((PG), IASE, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

²Research Scholar, Department of Education, Andhra University

Citation: Dr. D. Nagaraja Kumari et al (2024), Integrating Experiential Learning In Activating Socio-Emotional Competency (Self-Awareness) In Students: A School-Based Action Research, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 13598-13605
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.5887

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This school-based action research study explores the means to foster the development of socio-emotional competency, particularly self-awareness among students, through integrating experiential learning activities within the school settings. Recognizing the significance of socio-emotional skills in academic performance and personal well-being, the present study aimed to assess the effect of incorporating experiential learning strategies to develop socio-emotional competency- Self Awareness among the students of AP model school, G-Sigadam, Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh, South India.

Within educational settings, the researchers, with the support teachers, conducted action research on class VII students of their A.P Model School, G.Sigadam, Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh. The research methodology encompassed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. To study the research problem, the formulated hypothesis "Integrating Experiential Learning has a significant positive effect in activating explicit Socio-emotional Competency (Self-awareness) in students" was tested. Utilizing various tools and techniques, including pre- and post-intervention surveys, focus group discussions, classroom observations, structured interviews, and a checklist of socio-emotional concerns of students, the researchers implemented the series of planned day-wise experiential learning activities to activate the intrapersonal socio-emotional competency- Self-awareness.

From the quantitative data of the means of the Pretest (Mean-18, Standard Deviation- 4) and Posttest (Mean-38, Standard Deviation- 4.3), it can be interpreted that there is a significant positive effect of Integrating Experiential Learning in activating explicit Socio-emotional Competency (Self-awareness) in students. The obtained t-value, 7.95, is more than 1.96 and 2.58, which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively. Hence, the formulated hypothesis is accepted. This shows that **Integrating Experiential Learning will have a significant positive effect in activating explicit Socio-emotional Competency (Self-awareness) in students.**

The findings of qualitative data reveal that activating students' socio-emotional competency: Self-awareness, ultimately brought desirable change in students' perception of their socio-emotional make-up and helped to enhance their personality. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the critical role of teachers in inculcating socio-emotional competencies and underscores the importance of a supportive school environment. It emphasizes that through integrating experiential activities, there is a possibility to make a real change.

Key Words: Action Research, Experiential Learning, social-emotional competency, Self-awareness.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that children in all societies will eventually take on the social roles currently held by adults. Educational institutions have the crucial task of preparing children for these future responsibilities.

For many years, schools, teachers, and researchers have focused educational objectives primarily on learning and achievement. Numerous studies indicate that academic performance alone is not a comprehensive indicator of students' success. Beyond academic achievement, students must possess the skills to navigate various situations in school and society to thrive in life. Recently, there has been a notable rise in concerns regarding students' social and emotional well-being, adversely affecting both their academic progress and behavior. A significant issue in many classrooms is the lack of essential social-emotional skills among students, leading to undesirable behaviors and poor performance.

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) emphasizes the holistic development of students, encompassing their social, emotional, physical, mental, and intellectual growth, thereby promoting overall well-being, stating that the education system should aim to "develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy (Setu et al., 2020). In alignment with this, Indian education experts recognize the significance of social-emotional learning (SEL)

Socio-emotional issues in students can arise from various factors. It is crucial for schools and teachers to foster a supportive environment and build positive relationships with students to effectively address these issues by enhancing their socio-emotional competencies. These competencies encompass a range of skills and abilities related to understanding and managing emotions in social interactions. The theoretical foundations of socio-emotional competencies are based on several psychological and sociological theories. Notably, Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, as well as Daniel Goleman's popularization of Emotional Intelligence theory, provide important insights into these concepts

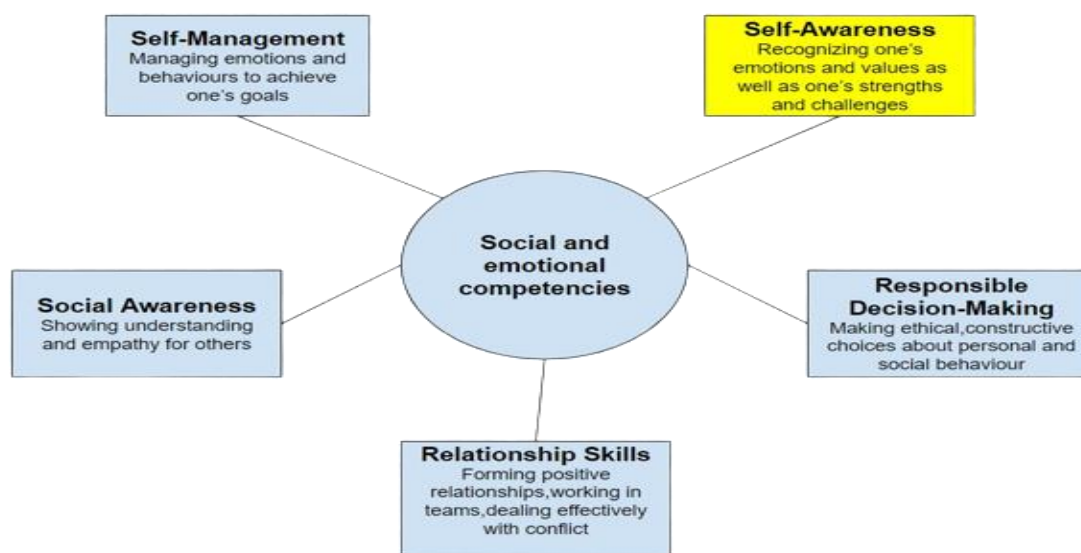


Figure 1. Socio-emotional core competencies

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), founded in 1994, has delineated five interconnected clusters of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies for students, termed Socio-emotional core competencies. These include Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Relationship skills, and Responsible decision-making. The first two competencies, Self-awareness and Self-management, are categorized as intrapersonal skills and attitudes, while the remaining three are classified as interpersonal skills and attitudes. Self-awareness is considered the foundational competency, essential for developing the other competencies. It involves a thorough and objective understanding and evaluation of oneself.

Self-awareness refers to the capacity to recognize and comprehend the elements that define you as an individual, encompassing your personality, actions, values, beliefs, emotions, and thoughts. It is a psychological state wherein the self becomes the focal point of attention. Although self-awareness is integral to your identity, it is not something you constantly concentrate on. Instead, it is embedded into your overall sense of self and manifests in varying degrees depending on the circumstances and your personality.

Self-awareness is crucial as it enables individuals to introspect and understand various aspects of themselves. Those with high self-awareness can regulate their behaviors and adapt to different situations effectively. They possess the ability to accurately assess what a situation demands and adjust their actions accordingly (Cherry, 2023; Verywell Mind, 2023).

Experiential learning (EL) is an educational philosophy and methodology where educators actively engage students in direct experiences, focused observation, and reflection, developing abstract concepts and their application in new contexts. This approach aims to enhance knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values. It is

also known as learning through action, doing, experience, discovery, and exploration. The theoretical underpinnings of experiential learning include constructivist learning theories, John Dewey's concept of "learning by doing," Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, and Kurt Lewin's field theory of learning.

According to Ernest T. Stringer (2014), Action research (AR) allows individuals to develop effective solutions to problems encountered in their daily lives. It is a systematic and reflective inquiry process employed by practitioners to identify, analyze, and address specific issues or problems within their practical context. This process includes collecting data, taking action, and continually reflecting on the outcomes to guide improvements and decision-making (Stringer, Year).

There is an increasing agreement in the education field that schools should focus on students' social-emotional development. New studies and widely read materials suggest that students' attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors can enhance outcomes. Experiential learning helps students become more analytical and effective at solving complex problems collaboratively. It also builds their confidence and self-awareness within a larger local and global context. Additionally, it aids in developing emotional literacy, executive functioning, and self-regulation, all crucial for social and emotional growth. By incorporating social and emotional learning practices into the curriculum, educators can foster environments that support positive relationships, resilience, and innovation among students. Moreover, applying social and emotional learning strategies in education can boost student engagement, social awareness, motivation, and academic success. (Annette Clancy 2019).

Review of Available Literature

Loomba, S., and Chawla, P. (3 Dec 2020) in Social and Emotional Learning: The Real Gap in India's Education System described that Social and emotional learning (SEL), a crucial dimension in a child's development, has remained largely unrecognized in the Indian education ecosystem.

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) underscores the importance of SEL to ensure the holistic development of children and states that the education system must aim to "develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy."

Allbright et al. (2019) emphasize the important role of teachers, whose task is to help students develop essential skills both within and outside the classroom. Educational experts increasingly agree that schools should focus on students' social-emotional development. However, many districts and schools continue to face challenges in implementing strategies to foster students' social-emotional skills.

Dhata, M. & Kumari, S. (2021), in the study "Social Emotional Learning," explained in spite of efforts being put into driving momentum around policy changes and mindset shifts of the system and various stakeholders, through our engagement in the socio-emotional learning space, India is still riddled with many challenges.

Bhat, S. & Pillai V, (February 9, 2022) Social-emotional learning in India: The importance of intersectionality emphasized the necessity of SEL programs to work inside the government school system where most children from marginalized backgrounds are generally enrolled

Kong, Y. (22 October 2021), in his conceptual analysis article, The Role of Experiential Learning on Students' Motivation and Classroom Engagement, focused on the importance of EL and its contributions to classroom engagement and motivation.

Joachim Broecheret et al. (February 2019) studied 'What Experiential Education is and why it is so important for a balanced emotional and social development of children and youth' is explained very clearly on the website of the Association for Experiential Education (AEE)

Setu et al. (2020) explained that Social and emotional learning is a sum total of several skills that can be taught and learned through formal and informal learning experiences. From the review of available literature, it is evident that the stakeholders in our education ecosystem have largely unrecognized the learning of social and emotional competencies. On the other hand, Experiential Learning is considered a standard pedagogical approach to teaching various curricular subjects at different levels. It can be best utilized to activate the Socio-emotional competencies in students. The study is based on the premise that it is possible and necessary for teachers to build practices that integrate both the cognitive and socio-emotional development of students. Hence, the researchers felt that findings of the action research to identify the socio-emotional concerns of students and integrating experiential learning to activate Socio-emotional Competency (Self-awareness) in students would not only be helpful to students but also pave ways for teachers to better understand the socio-emotional concerns of their students and take necessary measures.

The present study, "Integrating Experiential Learning in Activating Explicit Socio-emotional Competency (Self-awareness) in Students: A School-Based Action Research Study," is directed towards answering the research question below.

What is the impact of Experiential learning activities in activating explicit socio-emotional competency (Self-awareness) on students' behavior?

METHODOLOGY

Details of Sample

The present action research study was conducted in A.P. Model School, a Government secondary school that housed classes VI to XII, located in G. Sigadam, a rural, educationally backward block of Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh state. It was a tight-knit community with very little parent and community participation in the school. The sample for the study was the students of class VIIA and VIIB (93 students).The objective behind selecting the VII class is that all the teachers dealing with these classes have more anecdotes of behavioral problems and low achievement of students when compared to other classes.

To study the research problem, the below-mentioned hypothesis was framed for testing:

Integrating Experiential Learning will have a significant positive effect in activating explicit Socio-emotional Competency (Self-awareness) in students.

Tools and techniques

Adapting Lewin’s model (1946), the researchers attempted to integrate experiential learning activities to activate socio-emotional competency through this action research in a stage-wise manner. During the study, the researchers made good use of tools, namely Classroom observations, pre and post survey of a 5-point Likert-type rating scale on students’ self-awareness, Focus Group Discussions, a Checklist (of socio-emotional concerns of students), and interviews conducted within the school building to collect the data. The experiential learning activities conducted are – Mindfulness and meditation, “What Am I”? to identify their strengths and weaknesses, “RULER” for Identification of Emotions, Model Positive Self-Talks, Peer Praise, Goal Setting, and videos on Self Awareness.

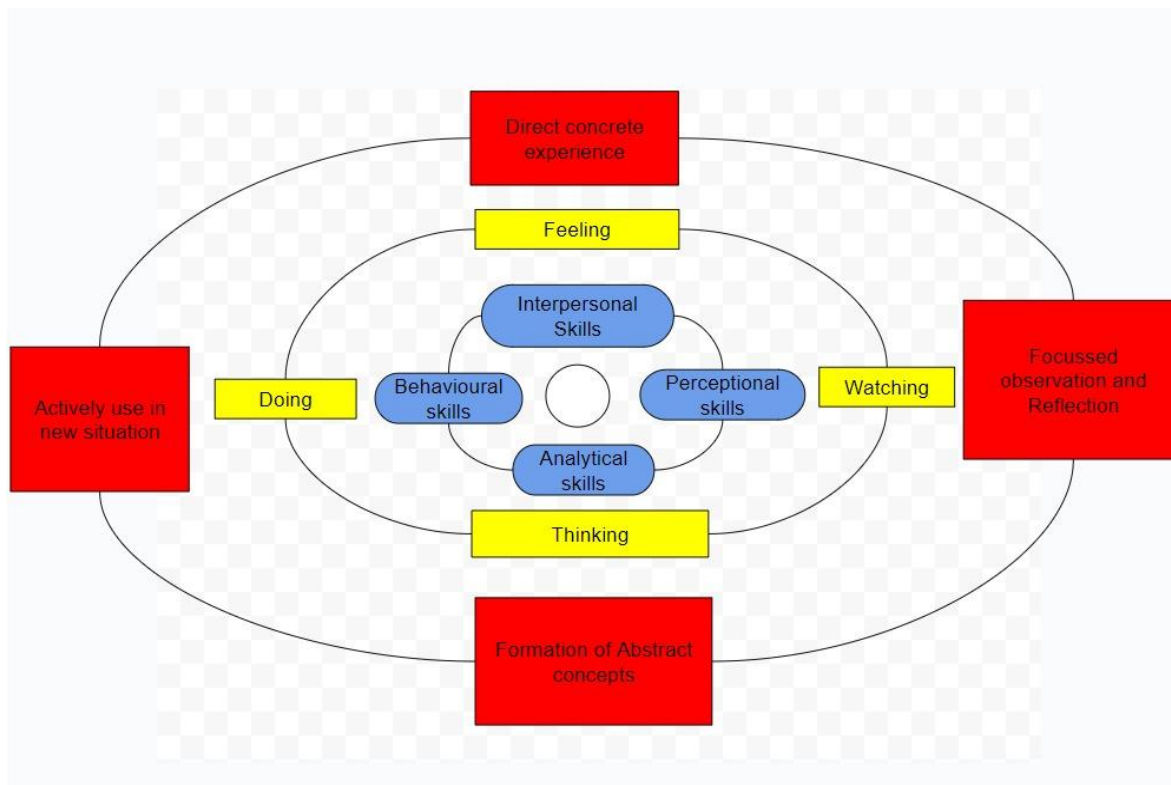


Figure 2: Integrating experiential learning to activate socio-emotional competencies

Table I. Summary of AR stages and the data collection techniques used in the study.

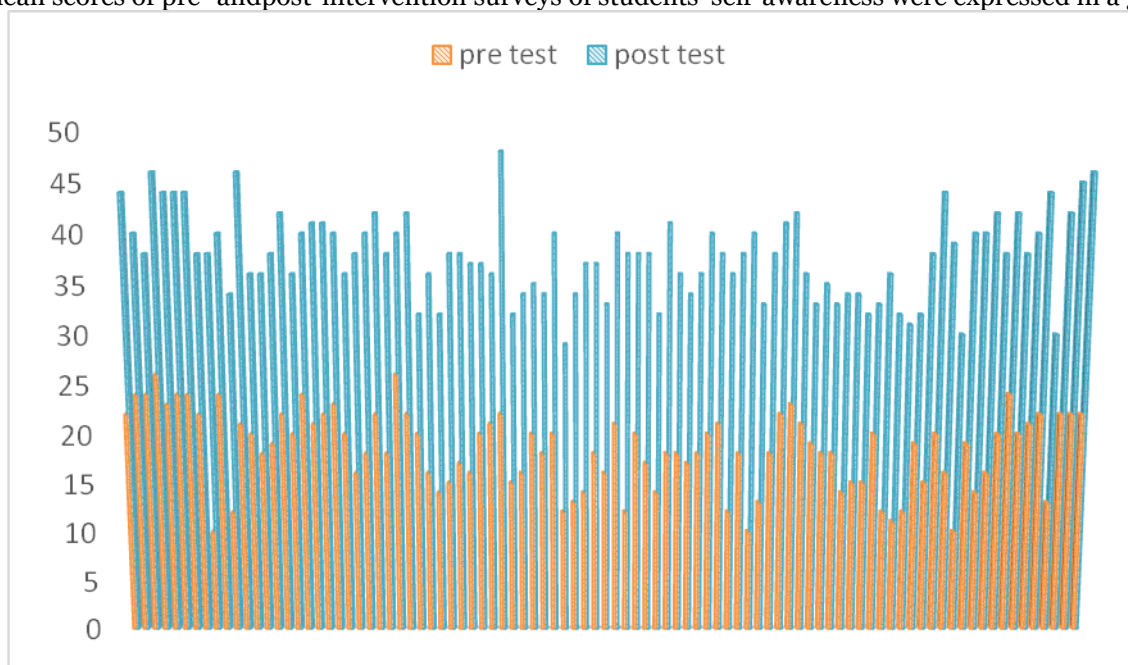
Stage	Description	Tools and Techniques
Stage 1: Identification of the problem	On 30-08-2023, in the monthly school complex meeting for professional development, a discussion regarding the change in students’ attitudes, behavior, and performance and improvement of competencies took place, which gave a trigger to think about and identify the problem.	Group discussion

Stage 2: Designing and action plan	A focus group discussion on the socio-emotional concerns observed by the teachers was conducted, and from a checklist of various socio-emotional concerns of students, the most common concerns were identified. Considering the paucity of time, the researchers decided to restrict the study to examine only one explicit Socio-emotional competency - the students' self-awareness. A detailed action plan with day-wise experiential activities (Mindfulness and meditation, What Am I ?, Identification of Emotions, Model Positive Self Talks, Goal Setting, Peer Praise, and videos on Self Awareness) to activate the competency: self-awareness was prepared.	Anecdotes of students Pre-survey of a 5 point Likert type rating scale on students' self-awareness
Stage 3: Implementation of day-wise experiential activities.	Researchers, with the support of teachers, implemented planned day-wise experiential activities for 10 days. And keptrack of students' feelings, experiences, and changes in their actions and behavior and conducted follow-up meetings.	Observation and conduct of day-wise Experiential learning activities. Reflective journaling by subjects. Post survey of a 5 point Likert type rating scale on students' self-awareness
Stage 4: Reflection and evaluation	Students will reflect on the experience they had and the impact these activities had in improving their Self-awareness through individual journaling, feedback, and interviews. The researchers and teachers evaluate the responses of students and their observations.	Teacher Journal Focus group interviews Semi-structured follow-up interviews
All stages		Researchers diary and observations

The data collected through various tools and techniques was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

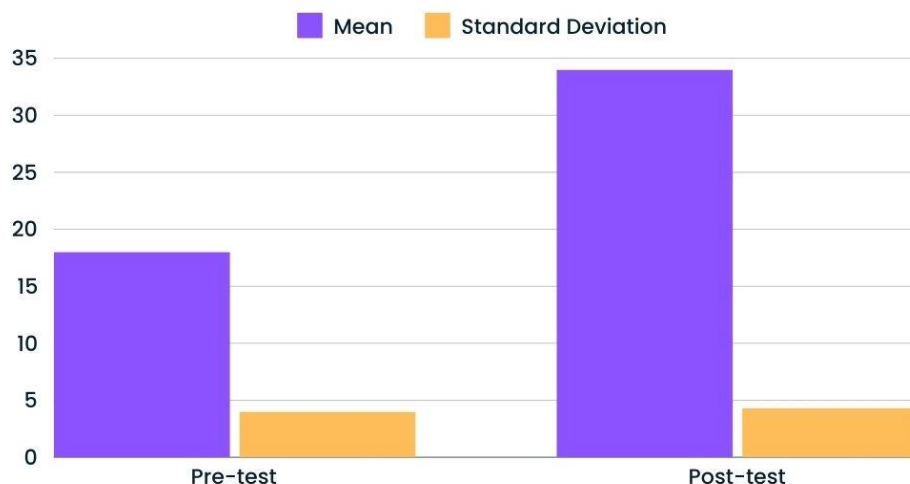
The mean scores of pre- and post-intervention surveys of students' self-awareness were expressed in a graph.



Graph shows the pre-test and post-test scores of 93 students of the class 7th

Table II. Showing the mean, standard deviation, and t-value of the pre-test and post-test scores of 9 students of the class 7th

	Mean	Standard Deviation	T – value
Pre-test	18	4.0	7.95
Post-test	34	4.3	



Graph II shows Means and Standard Deviation of the pre-test and post-test

The data of the means and standard deviation of the pre-test (Mean-18, Standard deviation 4) and Post-test (Mean-34, Standard deviation 4.3) indicate that the increase in the post-test mean indicates that integrating experiential learning has a significant positive effect on activating explicit Socio-emotional Competency (Self-awareness) in students.

Since the obtained t- value is 7.95 is more than 1.96 and 2.58, which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels respectively. Hence, the formulated hypothesis is accepted. This shows that **Integrating Experiential Learning will have a significant positive effect in activating explicit Socio-emotional Competency (Self-awareness) in students.**



Author explaining the concept WHO AM I? to the Students in the Classroom

Besides quantitative data, the review, thematic coding, and refining the consolidated themes of students' reflections during and after the conduct of experiential activities along with the observations of researchers and teachers, helped to analyse and derive insights and meaning.

In their feedback and individual interviews, most students reported that these activities impacted them personally. In particular, students verbalized that it helped them learn about their strengths and weaknesses. In this representative quote, a student described how the activity 'What Am I' deepened her self-awareness: *"I think I've learned to identify what I can do well and where I need improvement, which will help me to perform better."* Regarding the activity "RULER" for Identification of Emotions, the following quote illustrates how the activity helped the students, *"Practice of mindfulness activity has really helped us to change the way we handle emotional issues. I can control my undesirable emotions in and out of the classroom."* With respect to the "Goal Setting activity," the following statement of a student, *"I used to be very*

casual without any goal or ambition, but through these activities, I learned that it is essential to have a goal. And to reach them in life, we need to have small and short-term goals, and reaching these small goals will help us to improve ourselves."

Conclusion

The researchers, along with teachers who participated in the activities, reflected that in the classroom, they had observed students trying to self-monitor themselves. For instance, in classroom peer interactions, students ask each other: *Are you making a good decision? Can postponing work be considered a strength? Are you being honest?* This indicates a notable difference in the self-awareness of students. They also described that this practice made them understand the need to teach socio-emotional competencies and empowered them to make decisions they had not made before. Though the study was conducted for a short duration, the results reveal that activating students' Socio-emotional competency - self-awareness through experiential learning activities brought a desirable change in students' perception of their socio-emotional make-up and helped to enhance their personality. Furthermore, the study emphasizes that in addition to the focus on academic achievement, teachers need to play a critical role in inculcating students' socio-emotional competencies by integrating simple experiential activities into their daily classroom transactions. The study underscores the need for a supportive and congenial school environment to conduct experiential activities. It also contributes valuable insights into the practical applications of experiential learning as a means to overcome socio-emotional concerns and activate socio-emotional competencies, ultimately enhancing the students' holistic development and making them ready for future challenges. The researchers would like to conclude that providing supportive experiences in a congenial school environment and inculcating socio-emotional competency – Self-awareness, is like planting a seed in the soil for remarkable fruits for a bright future.

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