

MATERNAL ACTIVE LISTENING TO CHILDREN'S DAILY STORIES: ASSOCIATIONS WITH EARLY LITERACY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Dinar Nur Inten¹✉, Funny Lichandra²

¹Universitas Islam Bandung

²Universitas Islam Bandung

✉ Correspondence: dinar_nurinten@unisba.ic.id



Abstract: Parent-child communication is often dominated by one-way instruction, which marginalizes the important role of mothers as active listeners. This study aims to examine mothers' communication strategies when listening to their children's narratives and to investigate how these strategies contribute to early literacy development and socialization. A quantitative research design was employed using a survey of 238 mothers with children aged 4–6 years in Bandung Regency. Most respondents were housewives (71.8%) and had completed senior high school education (54.2%). Data were collected using a questionnaire comprising three dimensions: communication strategies, literacy contribution, and early socialization. The findings revealed that the most frequently employed active listening strategy was providing positive responses and asking open-ended questions, such as "Then what happened?", with 64.3% of respondents indicating "Strongly Agree". This strategy made a significant contribution to children's literacy development, as 95.8% of respondents reported improvements in their children's vocabulary richness. Regarding socialization, the routine was also found to strengthen emotional bonds between mothers and children (62.6% Strongly Agree) and help reduce children's tantrums. In conclusion, actively listening to children's daily stories is an effective form of developmental stimulation that strengthens emotional attachment and fosters children's early literacy and social development.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, Early Literacy, Mother-Child, Socialization

A. Introduction

The golden age is a crucial period in which the development of the brain and the architecture of the child's social behavior are rapidly formed. In this period, the family environment acts as the primary microsystem that determines the child's language and emotional development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; J. W. Santrock, 2019). In particular, mothers play a central role in nurturing and stimulating literacy in the home. This is especially relevant considering that most mothers, especially those who are housewives, have a higher intensity of interaction with children than other family members (Inten et al., 2020, 2023).

Effective communication in parenting not only serves as a means of exchanging information but also as a key foundation for language acquisition and the formation of children's self-concept (Yulianingsih et al., 2020). However, the communication paradigm in parenting is often still understood asymmetrically. Parents tend to dominate interactions by providing instructions, advice, or storytelling, while spaces for children to share their experiences are often ignored (Ahmad Susanto, 2023). This happens because the parenting communication paradigm remains asymmetrical, stemming from the strong hierarchical relationship between parents and children. Parents tend to use authoritarian communication styles that emphasize instruction, advice, and control, positioning children as passive recipients of messages and denying them adequate space to voice their own experiences and perspectives. In addition, low parental awareness of the importance of children's narrative participation leads to more adult-centered communication practices, which contributes to the silencing of children's voices in daily interactions (Lahtinen & Böök, 2024; Riza & Mohd Sukri, 2025).

This challenge is exacerbated by technoference, or technological disruption, which is triggered by the habit of multitasking and persuasive device design, repeatedly attracting parents' attention through notifications, social media, and digital work demands. The presence of gadgets often disrupts the quality of time together, where mothers are physically present but psychologically absent due to divided attention to the mobile phone screen (McDaniel et al., 2024; McDaniel & Radesky, 2018). Recent research shows that these distractions

correlate with decreased verbal and emotional responsiveness of mothers, which results in reduced communication quality as well as lost opportunities for children to gain positive feedback and emotional validation when trying to narrate their daily experiences (Chamam et al., 2024; Pratiwi & Setiawan, 2023). This situation requires a conscious strategy by mothers to minimize technological distractions to create an effective, dialogical listening space in parenting relationships.

Theoretically, listening to children's stories makes a significant contribution to emergent literacy. When children recount the events they experienced, they carry out a process of cognitive reconstruction: recall memories, vocabulary selection, and syntactic structures (Tamaputra, 2020). Mother's support through persuasive strategies, such as asking open-ended questions while listening, can stimulate children's narrative abilities, which are strong predictors of future reading skills (Dickinson et al., 2019).

According to several studies, smartphone use by mothers is associated with lower verbal responses and the quality of mother-child interaction, especially in the context of two-way communication (Nomkin & Gordon, 2021). As a result, children miss out on important opportunities for positive feedback, verbal reinforcement, and emotional validation when they seek to express their experiences and feelings. Additionally, inconsistent or delayed responses can inhibit the development of a child's sense of security and trust in the primary caregiver, thereby reducing the emotional attachment of mother and child (Alvarez Gutierrez & Ventura, 2021).

This phenomenon is particularly relevant to the present study because technoference may reduce opportunities for meaningful conversational exchanges between mothers and children. When mothers are distracted by digital devices, children have fewer chances to share their daily experiences, receive responsive feedback, and engage in extended conversations. Consequently, the development of narrative skills, vocabulary growth, and social communication competencies may be constrained. Conversely, mothers who intentionally set aside time to listen attentively to their children's stories may foster richer literacy and socialization experiences that support children's overall development.

Conceptually, listening to and retelling stories has a very important role in the development of emerging children's *literacy*. When children try to retell an experience or a story they have heard, they engage in complex thought processes, such as remembering events, choosing appropriate vocabulary, and composing sentences so that the story can be delivered coherently and meaningfully. This process contributes directly to the development of oral language and narrative skills that are the basis for children's reading readiness (Westerveld et al., 2021).

Various intervention studies have shown that parental involvement in reading and listening to interactive stories can improve the quality of retelling skills, enrich vocabulary, and improve sentence structure used by children (Adinarayanan et al., 2022). Mother's support through persuasive strategies, such as asking *open-ended questions*, inviting children to predict the storyline, or asking children to retell in their own language, is effective in stimulating children's narrative abilities, which are known to be strong predictors of future reading success (Nan & Tian, 2025).

Although previous studies consistently report positive effects of parental involvement on children's literacy development, most investigations have focused on shared reading activities, storytelling, or parental verbal instruction. Less attention has been paid to children's role as active narrators and to mothers' listening behaviors during everyday conversations. Furthermore, existing studies often examine literacy outcomes independently from children's socialization skills, despite evidence suggesting that both domains develop simultaneously through interactive communication experiences.

These findings are also in line with various local studies that show that the practice of storytelling and retelling in the family environment can activate a child's episodic memory, expand vocabulary, and train the ability to form sentences sequentially from an early age (Hettiarachchi et al., 2025)

In addition to the cognitive aspect, the socialization aspect is also greatly affected. In line with the findings of Inten, Permatasari, and Ryan (2021), communication intimacy built through intense interaction at home is the key to children's

emotional stability (Inten et al., 2021). Children who are listened to with empathy tend to have better regulation of emotions, reduce the frequency of tantrums, and better understand social etiquette, such as taking turns (Gottman & Declaire, 2015).

Despite growing evidence on family literacy and parent-child communication, several gaps remain in the literature. First, most studies conceptualize parents primarily as providers of literacy input through storytelling, reading aloud, or instructional interactions. Second, relatively little attention has been given to children's position as active storytellers whose daily narratives may stimulate language and social development. Third, previous studies generally focus on either literacy outcomes or socio-emotional development in isolation, while the potential association between maternal listening practices and both domains remains underexplored. Finally, empirical evidence from Indonesian family contexts, particularly involving mothers with diverse educational backgrounds, is still limited.

This study advances existing scholarship in three important ways. First, it shifts the focus from mothers as providers of literacy input to mothers as active listeners who facilitate children's opportunities to construct and communicate personal narratives. Second, it simultaneously examines the association of maternal listening practices with both early literacy and socialization, two developmental domains that are often investigated separately. Third, the study provides empirical evidence from the Indonesian family context, where research on listening-centered communication strategies remains scarce. By highlighting children's daily storytelling as a meaningful interactional practice, this study contributes a more child-centered perspective to the literature on family communication and early childhood development.

Although the urgency of family communication has been widely discussed, there is a gap in the existing literature. Most prior research focused on parents' strategies as "messengers" or inputs. For example, Inten's (2024) research highlights the effectiveness of the Read Aloud method to foster literacy, while Permatasari and Inten (2020) explore Hariring Indung as a medium of cultural communication (Permatasari & Inten, 2020). There are still a few studies that specifically examine the impact of "Listening to

Children's Stories", namely, children as storytellers/outputs as a structured strategy applied by mothers with various educational backgrounds.

The novelty of this research lies in the reversal of the perspective on the study of parenting communication, namely by focusing on mothers' role as active listeners to children's daily narratives and on specific strategies used, such as positive responses and provocative questions, in the context of families in Bandung Regency. This study aims to analyze how mothers' communication strategies while listening contribute simultaneously to children's literacy and early socialization skills. Bandung Regency was chosen as the research location because, first, several studies show that families, especially mothers, have a significant role in the development of children's early literacy through daily interactions at home, but the study still emphasizes the stimulation and teaching aspects rather than the mother's position as an active listener to children's narratives (Inten et al., 2023). Second, Bandung Regency represents an area that faces literacy challenges as well as the dynamics of the parenting transition in the digital era, so that responsive and dialogical mother-child communication practices are crucial to support the development of literacy and early socialization of children simultaneously (Inten et al., 2025).

B. Method

This study uses a quantitative approach and an analytical, descriptive design to empirically test the relationship between variables. The selection of this approach is based on the research objective of generalizing the phenomenon of parental communication strategies in a specific region (Creswell & David Creswell, 2018). The research method applied is a survey, which allows researchers to collect data from a large population to describe certain aspects of the research object (Sugiyono, 2019).

The subjects of this study are mothers whose children are in the early childhood age range of 4 to 6 years and who live in Bandung Regency. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, in which participants were selected based on criteria relevant to the study's purpose, namely, mothers who actively accompany their children during the golden age. The

total number of respondents collected was 238. Demographically, the respondent profile was dominated by housewives (IRT) at 71.8%, with a high school background (SMA) as the last level of education at 54.2%. This composition reflects the sociological characteristics of urban-rural communities in Bandung Regency, where mothers' roles as the primary educators at home remain dominant. The following table 1 presents detailed data on the characteristics of respondents:

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Features	Category	Number (People)	Percentage (%)
Mother's Age	<25 Years	9	3,8%
	25-35 Years	156	65,5%
	>35 Years	73	30,7%
Final Education	Elementary School	59	24,8%
	SMA	129	54,2%
	Diploma/S1	49	20,6%
	S2 and above	1	0,4%
Employment Status	Housewives	171	71,8%
	Work Full-Time	40	16,8%
	Working Part-Time	27	11,3%
Child's Age	4 Years	14	5,9%
	5 Years	79	33,2%
	6 Years	145	60,9%
Child's Gender	Male	123	51,7%
	Women	115	48,3%
Total		238	100%

The respondent recruitment procedure was conducted online by sending questionnaires to mothers of children studying at Kindergarten (TK) and Islamic Kindergarten (Raudhatul Athfal/ RA) in the Bandung Regency area. The researcher used a network of communication groups of parents of students in the Bandung Regency area. To mitigate potential sampling bias from the independent questionnaire method, the researcher distributed

the link in waves across various sub-districts, applied strict inclusion criteria at the beginning of the questionnaire, and limited the time to complete the questionnaire.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire designed using the Likert scale. The research instrument was developed based on three main dimensions that were the focus of the research, namely:

1. Communication strategy: measuring the way the mother creates a space for dialogue through listening to the child's daily stories.
2. Literacy contribution: measuring mothers' perceptions of improving children's language skills and symbolic comprehension.
3. Early socialization: measuring the extent to which communication patterns help children adapt to their social environment.

The development of this instrument refers to the theory of interpersonal communication and childcare, which emphasizes that parental involvement in verbal interaction is fundamental to children's cognitive development (J. Santrock, 2021). The details of the statements in this instrument are derived theoretically by adapting the indicators of the parent-child communication scale to the local cultural context of the community in Bandung Regency. Before conducting field trials, the draft of this instrument first undergoes the expert judgment stage to ensure the content's suitability and the language's readability. The questionnaire consists of 20 questions with three aspects to map communication strategies. Here are the complete aspects and indicators in Table 2:

Table 2. Research Aspects

Research Aspects	Strategy and Impact Indicators
Mother's Communication Strategy	1. Listen to your child's stories without interrupting
	2. Give a positive response (e.g., interesting!) after the child tells a story
	3. Invite children to continue the story with open-ended questions
	4. Listen to the child's story for at least 10-15 minutes every day
	5. Avoiding distractions (HP/TV) when listening to children's stories
	6. Repeating the child's story in your own words for confirmation
	7. Connecting the child's story with their own words for confirmation
	8. Record or remember details of the child's story to revisit
Contribution to Children's Literacy	9. Children get a richer vocabulary after telling stories all day long
	10. Children are easier to understand book stories after this routine
	11. The child starts trying to write/draw his own daily story
	12. Children are more confident in reading aloud after storytelling practice
	13. Children's daily stories show an improvement in sentence structure
	14. Children often associate daily stories with the letters/numbers they learn

Early Socialization of Children	15. Children are more open to sharing their feelings after a listening routine
	16. Children learn empathy by sharing the perspective of others
	17. The emotional connection between mother and child is getting closer
	18. Children are more likely to interact with siblings/friends afterward
	19. Children reduce tantrums because they feel heard
	20. Help children understand basic social norms (sharing turns)

To ensure the instrument’s validity before the main data collection, the researcher conducted a pilot *test*. Empirical evaluation of the quality of the instrument was carried out using Reliability Analysis in the JASP software, which evaluates items based on the item-test correlation value and tests internal consistency using the Cronbach’s Alpha (α) coefficient indicator. The standard set for the validity of an item is a positive correlation of >0.20 , while the instrument is considered reliable if the reliability coefficient is >0.70 . Based on the results of data analysis, all statements in this questionnaire are declared valid and reliable with the following details:

- 1) The Mother Communication Strategy variable (X) consists of 8 statements that are all valid, with *item-rest correlation* values ranging from 0.262 to 0.671. The internal consistency index for this variable was very good, with a Cronbach’s α of 0.783.
- 2) The Child Literacy Contribution Variable (Y1) consists of 6 statements with high *item-rest correlation* values ranging from 0.581 to 0.800. The reliability is very high, with a Cronbach’s α of 0.883.
- 3) The Early Childhood Socialization Variable (Y2) consists of 6 statements that are all valid with a range of item-rest correlations values of 0.649 to 0.789. Cronbach’s α value for this variable reaches 0.888.

Through this rigorous testing procedure, the questionnaire was empirically shown to represent the aspects of communication

between mother and child studied, ensuring that the data generated were accurate in capturing this phenomenon.

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and describe the distribution of responses across the three research variables. Prior to inferential analysis, the normality of the data was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which indicated that the data were not normally distributed ($p < .001$). Therefore, a non-parametric statistical approach was adopted, and Spearman's rank-order correlation (ρ) was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships among the research variables. Data analysis also involved coding, tabulation, and interpretation to identify response patterns and behavioral tendencies related to mothers' communication strategies. These procedures were intended to provide an accurate understanding of how mothers' active listening to their children's daily stories is associated with children's early literacy development and socialization in Bandung Regency.

This research process is structured around a systematic thought process to ensure the validity and depth of the analysis. Broadly speaking, there are 5 stages in this research:

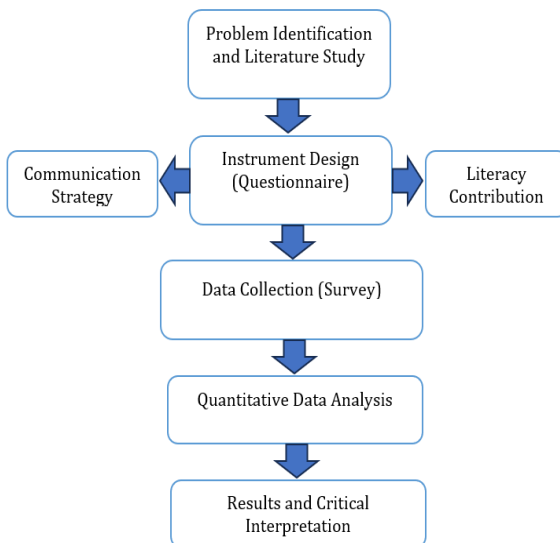


Figure 1. Research Flow

Overall, the quantitative survey method was chosen to provide an objective and measurable picture of mother-child communication in Bandung Regency. The entire research process is carried out in strict accordance with ethical principles. Before filling out the questionnaire, the researcher provided a digital consent sheet after explanation (informed consent) on the first page. Prospective respondents were given complete information about the purpose of the study, benefits, and affirmation that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without sanction. The researcher guarantees the confidentiality of personal data by implementing an anonymity system in which respondents' identities are disguised (using an identification code), and the data collected is used solely for academic analysis and processed transparently.

C. Result and Discussion

This section presents the results of the analysis of survey data on 238 maternal respondents in Bandung Regency and discusses the findings by relating them to previous theories and research. Based on demographic data, respondents are predominantly housewives (71.8%) with a high school education (54.2%). The high proportion of housewives in this sample provides an important context that the physical intensity of mothers at home is very high. Still, the quality of interaction needs to be tested through the communication strategies applied.

In general, this study dissects three main variables: Communication Strategy, Literacy Contribution, and Early Socialization. A summary of descriptive statistics regarding the most dominant key indicators in each variable is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Dominance of Communication Strategy Indicators and Their Contributions

Variabel	Key Indicators (Questionnaire Items)	% Strongly Agree	Category
Communication Strategy	Ask open-ended questions ("Then what?")	64,3%	Very Dominant
	Provide a positive response ("Interesting!")	60,1%	Dominant
	Avoiding the distractions of gadgets (HP/TV)	55,0%	Height
Literacy	Enrichment of children's vocabulary	60,1%	Dominant
	Improved sentence structure	47,9%	Medium
Socialization	Strengthening emotional connections	62,6%	Very Dominant
	Reduce tantrum behavior	53,8%	Height
	Turn-taking understanding	53,4%	Height

Source: Primary Data Processing Results (2025)

Based on Table 1, the findings show an interesting shift in communication patterns. While traditional communication in parenting is often instructive, field data show that 64.3% of mothers in Bandung Regency strongly agree with using *open-ended question* strategies (such as fishing with the word "Then what?") when children tell stories, a higher percentage than for passive listening. This indicates that mothers have intuitively applied *scaffolding techniques* to provoke children's narratives to

be longer. Opening questions are generally given at the moment of narrative transition, which is when the child pauses while telling a story, after relaying an event, or when the child shows an emotional expression without a complete verbal description. Another moment considered appropriate is in quiet, reflective times, such as after the child has returned from activities or before going to bed, when the child's psychological state is more receptive. Questions are posed dialogically with warm intonation and without an interrogative tone, so that the child feels emotionally safe to continue the story.

Functionally, the opening question serves as communicative scaffolding that extends children's speech, trains narrative thinking, and enriches vocabulary, thereby supporting the development of early literacy. At the same time, this strategy strengthens early socialization by making children feel valued and heard. Ratnasari (2007) emphasized that harmonious communication between parents and children is characterized by openness, empathy, and the existence of a dialogue space that allows children to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of being blamed or judged (Ratnasari, 2007). In line with that, dialogical communication in the family has been shown to correlate with increased emotional attachment and the ability to regulate children's emotions (DeVito, 2008), as well as the creation of communication intimacy that is not determined by the length of time together, but by the intensity of dialogue and the ability of parents to translate children's messages empathetically (Permatasari et al., 2020). Thus, the predominance of open-ended questions in this study's findings indicates that mothers in Bandung Regency have developed an effective, conversation-oriented communication pattern to strengthen the foundation of literacy and children's social-emotional relationships.

Regarding communication barriers, the data show that 55% of respondents strongly agree that they should avoid distractions from gadgets when children tell stories. Although this percentage is relatively high, it remains lower than verbal strategies such as open-ended questions (64.3%), confirming that *technoference* is still a residue in parenting practices. This shows that full psychological presence is more difficult to achieve than physical presence alone, in line with the findings of McDaniel and Radesky

(2018). Parents tend to avoid gadgets because storytelling activities are understood as moments of emotional attachment that demand focus, eye contact, and empathic responses (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018).

The study of family communication emphasizes that dialogical and harmonious communication can only be built when parents are truly present and create a safe space for children to express their experiences and emotions (DeVito, 2008; Ratnasari, 2007). On the other hand, device distractions reduce the sensitivity and quality of the mother's response to the child's verbal and nonverbal cues, so that the child tends to shorten the story or express frustration behaviorally (Chamam et al., 2024). These findings are in line with the study of local Sundanese wisdom on *motherhood*, which shows that mother-child communication that is free from distractions, accompanied by touch, eye contact, and warm intonation, can build intimacy, a sense of security, and encourage children to be more comfortable expressing their emotions verbally (Permatasari & Inten, 2020). Thus, efforts to avoid gadget distractions in this study can be interpreted as a mother's conscious strategy to maintain the quality of dialogical communication that supports the development of literacy and the early socialization of children.

Contribution to Literacy: From Receptive to Expressive

In the literacy aspect, 95.8% of respondents (combined agree and strongly agree) reported that they perceived improvements in their children's vocabulary development following routine daily storytelling interactions. These findings offer a new perspective that complements the Read Aloud method. If Inten's (2024) research states that reading books is effective in providing language input (receptive), then the active listening strategy in this study functions as a stimulator of language output (expressive).

When the mother asks an open-ended question (Item 3), the child is encouraged to engage in cognitive reconstruction by recalling events, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and organizing ideas into coherent sentences. This process is described by Tamaputra (2020) as a natural syntactic exercise. This process is theoretically associated with the development of spoken language and narrative skills that support children's reading readiness. This is also in line with Inten et al. (2023), who position mothers

as the main actors in literacy. Still, this study specifies the role of mothers not only as “sources of stories” but also as “active editors” who improve children’s thinking structures through listening responses.

Contribution to Socialization: Emotional Validation

In the socialization aspect, the most significant impact was in strengthening inner bonds, with 62.6% of mothers strongly agreeing that their emotional connection was growing closer. The routine of listening to children’s trivial stories turns out to act as a mechanism for emotional validation. This is relevant to the theory of emotion coaching by Gottman and DeClaire (2015), in which children who feel heard have better emotion regulation.

Field data support this theory, as 53.8% of respondents reported a perceived reduction in the frequency of tantrum behaviors among their children. When a child’s emotions are channeled through verbal narratives, the need to explode in physical tantrums decreases. In addition, the implicit rule of “one talk, one listen” teaches the basic social norms of turn-taking, which is agreed by 53.4% of respondents. These findings reinforce the study by Inten, Permatasari, and Ryan (2021), which found that communication intimacy is the key to children’s emotional stability post-pandemic.

Limitations and Future Directions

The weakness of this study lies in the self-report method, which has the potential to introduce social desirability bias, in which mothers may report ideal practices (such as avoiding gadgets) more often than in reality. A suggestion for future research is to use a participatory observation method to measure the duration of pure mother-eye contact during children’s storytelling. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that listening to children’s stories is a double-edged investment strategy: building both literacy intelligence and emotional maturity.

D. Conclusion

This study found that mothers in Bandung Regency frequently reported using active listening strategies when listening to their children’s daily stories, particularly through open-ended questions and positive verbal responses. Respondents perceived these

communication practices as creating opportunities for children to share their experiences, organize their narratives, and engage in meaningful conversations within the family context.

The findings further suggest a perceived association between maternal listening practices and children's literacy and socialization development. Most respondents reported perceived improvements in children's vocabulary use, narrative expression, emotional closeness, turn-taking behavior, and emotional regulation. These findings highlight the potential value of active listening as an important component of family communication. However, these outcomes were based on maternal perceptions rather than direct assessments of children's developmental competencies.

The novelty of this study lies in highlighting mothers' listening practices as a family communication strategy that complements existing family literacy approaches. While previous studies have primarily emphasized parents as providers of literacy input through reading and storytelling activities, this study highlights children's role as active storytellers and mothers' role as attentive listeners who support children's opportunities for self-expression.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied on self-reported survey data from mothers, which may be subject to response bias. Second, children's literacy and socialization outcomes were not measured directly through observation or standardized assessment. Third, the cross-sectional survey design does not allow conclusions regarding causal relationships among variables.

Future research may employ observational methods, direct child assessments, or mixed-method approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how maternal listening practices relate to children's literacy and social development

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