

## MULTIDIMENSIONAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT MODEL FOR PESANTREN: A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO COUNTERACT RADICALISM

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### Abstract

Amid the threat of radicalism and terrorism in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools are often viewed as breeding grounds for radical groups. This study examines the multidimensional approach in the curriculum of Pondok Pesantren Darul Ishlah Tulang Bawang, Indonesia, to counter radicalism. A case study design involving in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation was employed for this study. The results of this study indicate the need for the integration of moderate values in the pesantren curriculum and activities. This included the enrichment of materials related to life skills. This study also underlines the importance of professionalism in the development of pesantren management through public involvement and technology integration. In addition, regulatory strengthening, government supervision, and cooperation between pesantrens and related institutions are other substantial findings of the study. This multidimensional approach is relevant to prevent pesantrens from becoming hotbeds of radicalism. This encourages the generation of peace agents. A detailed elaboration of efforts to prevent radicalism and terrorism in Indonesia through the pesantren curriculum and management is provided in the study.

**Keywords:** *Multidimensional; Curriculum; Islamic Boarding School; Deradicalization.*

## **Abstrak**

*Di tengah ancaman radikalisme dan terorisme di Indonesia, pesantren kerap dicurigai sebagai basis regenerasi kelompok Islam radikal. Atas dasar itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilik pendekatan multidimensi dalam kurikulum Pondok Pesantren Darul Ishlah Tulang Bawang untuk menangkal radikalisme. Metode penelitian kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus digunakan, melibatkan wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan perlunya integrasi nilai-nilai moderat dalam kurikulum dan kegiatan pesantren, pengayaan materi kecakapan hidup, peningkatan profesionalisme manajemen pesantren melalui pelibatan publik dan teknologi informasi, penguatan regulasi dan pengawasan pesantren oleh pemerintah, serta peningkatan kerjasama antar pesantren dan lembaga terkait. Pendekatan multidimensi ini penting untuk mencegah pesantren menjadi sarang radikalisme dan mewujudkan perannya sebagai agen perdamaian. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada upaya pencegahan radikalisme dan terorisme di Indonesia dengan memberikan rekomendasi konkret untuk penguatan kurikulum dan manajemen pesantren.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Multidimensi; kurikulum; pondok pesantren; deradikalisasi.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Radicalism and terrorism have posed significant threats to Indonesia over the past two decades. National Counter-Terrorism Agency (2021) shows a sharp increase in terrorism attacks from only a few cases in the early 2000s to hundreds of cases in 2020. Radical groups are suspected to grow and recruit new members, particularly from the younger generation. Since terrorism is often linked to religion, as a traditional Islamic educational institution, pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools) are often suspected of being a base for the recruitment of new

members of radical Islamic groups. This stereotype occurs because of several terrorism cases involving alumni or students from pesantrens.

Several studies suggest that classical books tend to spread intolerance, legitimization of violence, and anti-Western views, while the passive Sorogan method has the potential to limit the critical thinking skills of santri (Basri, 2017; Firdaus, 2020; Kurniawan, 2019). Statements highlighting the tendency of intolerance, legitimization of violence, and anti-Western views from a Western point of view in classical books are often in the spotlight. However, it is worth noting that these books are classic works that emerged from a specific socio-historical context. As with other writings, understanding the context in which they were written and interpreting them correctly is crucial, especially for classical Islamic texts. In a recent study published in the *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies*, Azhari and Zainuddin (2023) shed light on salaf pesantrens becoming a stronghold of moderation and tolerance thanks to their strong scholarly tradition and proportional interpretation of books. Another study in the *Journal of Religious and Community Studies* describes that the values of moderation and tolerance are deeply rooted in the tradition of salaf pesantren (Arifin & Mukhibat., 2021). This study revealed that salaf pesantren have a scientific tradition that prioritizes *tawassuth* (moderate), *tawazun* (balanced), dan *tasamuh* (tolerant).

Additionally, while the Sorogan method is often seen as passive, it is an integral part of the broader learning process within the pesantren tradition (Azhari & Zainuddin, 2023). A study conducted by Hafidah and Suharto (2022) indicated that the Sorogan method builds the critical thinking ability of santri

through an intensive discussion between kiai and santri. This method allows for direct feedback and an in-depth study of the material. The study also revealed that the Sorogan method is often combined with other methods, such as deliberation and bahtsul masail, which facilitate critical discussions (Hafidah & Suharto, 2022).

When examining the pesantren curriculum, it is necessary to consider the typology of pesantrens mentioned by experts such as Zamakhsyari Dhofier in his monumental work. Dhofier divides pesantren into two main categories, namely *salaf* (traditional) and *khalaf* (modern) pesantrens. Salaf pesantrens generally only teach classical Islamic sciences through the recitation of the Kitab Kuning (*kutubul muktabarrah*), while *khalaf* pesantren have adopted a modern curriculum by including general subjects such as math, science, social studies, and languages.

The criticism that the pesantren curriculum struggles to balance Islamic teachings with the development of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and critical thinking generally applies to salaf pesantrens. Khalaf pesantren includes 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and a more critical learning approach. However, there is still room for further improvement, especially in terms of optimizing the use of information technology in learning, as expressed in his research (Kusuma, 2021). The salaf-pesantren curriculum is still unable to balance Islamic teaching with the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and critical thinking skills of santri. This is vulnerable to radical group ideologies (Asrori, 2022). Pesantren have also not optimally utilized information technology in learning, so they tend to be closed (Kusuma, 2021).

From management and institutional perspectives, many pesantrens remain focused on the authority of the kiai, with limited involvement from other stakeholders. This results in poor innovation of the curriculum and teaching methodology in pesantrens (Asrori, 2022). The National Counterterrorism Agency also reported that the coordination forum between pesantrens is inadequate in effectively filtering the influence of radicalism (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme, 2021). In terms of regulation and supervision, the national standards for pesantren education have only been applied to a limited number of pesantrens (Kemenag, 2021). Local governments' oversight of the curriculum, activities, and funding of pesantrens remains weak, creating gaps that allow radicalism to infiltrate. To improve security, the government must strengthen the regulations and supervision of pesantrens. It is important to provide training for pesantren teachers to help them identify and prevent the spread of radicalism. Cooperation between the government, pesantrens, and community should be improved to create a safer and more conducive educational environment. The multidimensional approach urges comprehensive reform of pesantrens to stem the flow of radicalism. Collaboration among various stakeholders is required. Preventive efforts to strengthen the curriculum and the management of pesantrens are necessary.

Curriculum reform should incorporate the integration of moderate Islamic values, enhancement of life skills and citizenship education, and adoption of critical learning methods. The professional development of pesantren management through public involvement and ICT utilization is imperative. The diplomacy between pesantrens needs to be improved to maintain the purity of Islamic teachings. Government

regulations and supervision should be strengthened to ensure that pesantrens are not infiltrated by radicalism. Strengthening cooperation between pesantrens in Indonesia and Islamic education institutions abroad is also crucial for enriching moderate and tolerant insights (Ahmed & Huda, 2023). This cooperation can be achieved through student exchange programmes, collaborative research, and joint intellectual conferences. Thus, the resilience of Indonesian pesantrens to the threat of religious extremism can increase. For this reason, this study examines the development of a pesantren curriculum to protect students from radicalism. This study is expected to provide a concrete example of an effort to strengthen the curriculum and management of Pondok Pesantren to prevent the growth of radicalist seeds. Policies that accommodate diversity and encourage participation by involving both the internal and external elements of the pesantren are crucial in preventing them from becoming breeding grounds for radicalism. It is hoped that pesantrens will cultivate agents of peace, enlightenment, and societal progress. Pesantren is expected to be the stronghold of the Republic of Indonesia in combating radicalism and terrorism.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design (Yin, 2018). This approach was chosen because of its ability to provide an in-depth and holistic description of a phenomenon in its actual context. This study examines the curriculum development strategy of pesantrens to counteract radicalism. The pesantren selected as the object of the study was purposively chosen based on its vision and mission in protecting

the pesantren curriculum from radicalism. Pesantren should demonstrate a commitment to prevent radicalism and actively take steps to address it.

Data collection included in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies, following Creswell (2016). In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants such as pesantren caregivers, ustadz, and santri. These interviews focused on their experiences, perceptions, and opinions about curriculum development strategies and efforts to prevent radicalism in pesantrens. Observations were made to determine how the curriculum was implemented. It also investigated the interactions between caregivers, ustadz, and santri. Documentation studies involve analyzing related documents, such as curriculum documents, lesson plans, and learning materials.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model. This involves three stages of data analysis: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves coding and categorizing the data. Data presentation includes visualizing data in the form of diagrams, tables, or narratives. Conclusion drawing involves interpreting the data and making analytical findings. The results of this study are in the form of descriptions and analytical findings on the multidimensional strategy of developing a pesantren curriculum to counteract radicalism. The findings of this study are expected to provide new insights and practical recommendations for pesantrens and related parties to prevent radicalism.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pesantren Darul Ishlah Tulang Bawang has its own challenges in dealing with the potential for radicalization among students. This study aimed to develop a multidimensional approach to counteract radicalism in a pesantren curriculum. Increased religious understanding, character building, and the integration of general knowledge are necessary to create a holistic and balanced educational environment. This study provides several important findings related to the multidimensional strategy of Pesantren Darul Ishlah Tulang Bawang's curriculum development to prevent the growth of radicalism. The goal is to harmonize religious understanding, character development, and general knowledge. By integrating the curriculum, it is hoped that Santri will develop strong morals, critical thinking skills, and the ability to make positive contributions to society.

### **Pesantren Curriculum and Teaching Method Transformation**

The first multidimensional curriculum development involved teaching materials. Research shows that classical books taught in pesantrens tend to indicate intolerance, legitimization of violence, and anti-Western views (Basri, 2017; Kurniawan, 2019; Firdaus, 2020). In addition, the passive Sorogan method has the potential to limit the critical thinking abilities of santris. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate moderate Islamic values to foster life skills, citizenship, and critical learning methods (Firdaus, 2020). The material designed by Pesantren Darul Ishlah Tulang Bawang, which is related to life skills and citizenship, is a progressive step for future education. This equips the santri with religious knowledge and practical skills. Pesantren should



become an education center that is relevant to the demands of the times (Firdaus, 2020)

Before discussing the substance of teaching in pesantrens further, it is important to clarify the typology of pesantrens in this study. Based on previous studies (Basri, 2017; Kurniawan, 2019; Firdaus, 2020), it seems that they took the research locus of Pondok Pesantren Darul Ishlah, which adheres to the typology of salaf (traditional) pesantren. Pesantren Darul Ishlah is one of the leading salaf pesantren in Indonesia that still upholds the tradition of teaching the *Buku Kuning* (*kutubul muktabarah*) in its teaching. The curriculum in this pesantren focuses on deepening classical Islamic sciences such as *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *tasawwuf*, and tool science (*nahwu* and *sharaf*). The teaching methods used were Bandongan, Sorogan, and a discussion that emphasized a deep understanding of these classical texts. However, the content that may be interpreted as intolerance, legitimization of violence, and anti-Western views requires serious attention to be analyzed more deeply and comprehensively. The Sorogan method, which is passively applied in pesantrens, is also an important concern for this study. This method could potentially limit the independent and critical thinking abilities of santri. Therefore, there is a need for innovation in pesantren learning methods to better encourage independent thinking in understanding meaning and improving critical analysis skills in santri (Murtafiah, 2021).

The effort to integrate moderate Islamic values in Pesantren Darul Ishlah Tulang Bawang is a relevant alternative to pesantren. By incorporating the values of tolerance, intercultural dialog, and a more contextual understanding of global issues, the pesantren can become an educational institution that not only

produces scholars who are knowledgeable religiously but also are open-minded about differences and modernization. Deconstruction of the pesantren education paradigm is required to support the efforts to prevent radicalism. Research conducted by Listyaningsih (2023) highlights that the pesantren educational paradigm tends to be textual and exclusive. For this reason, deconstruction of the pesantren education paradigm should be directed towards an open, contextual, and inclusive paradigm. The implementation of an open education paradigm is indicated by pesantrens' readiness to receive input and positive cooperation from outsiders, which is reflected in their ability to blend Islamic values with contemporary society. The inclusive paradigm is characterized by a friendly attitude and appreciation of pesantrens towards diversity.

Learning innovation should be updated to avoid boredom among students who are prone to exploitation by radical groups. implementing varying learning methods in pesantrens through the application of a quantum teaching model is suggested (Ismail, 2024). This model prioritizes fun, contextual, and participatory activities to build santri's interest in learning. The application of this model is expected to increase santri's learning motivation as well as prevent them from being dragged in radicalism.

Strengthening pesantren management and institutions is another way to optimize pesantren management. The board plays a vital role in designing educational policies and programs for pesantrens (Nadhirin, 2024). Therefore, enhancing the capacity and role of the board is essential rather than relying solely on the figure of the kiai. Thus, pesantren management should be directed to be more participatory and aspirational in responding

to evolving circumstances without losing the essential values of pesantren.

A learning method that emphasizes students' critical thinking can be a solution to overcome the limitations of the passive Sorogan method. By encouraging santri to ask questions and detail, as well as analyze information, pesantrens can become a more dynamic and progressive place. In addition, the integration of digital literacy into pesantrens, particularly through e-learning media, necessitates the development of individual skills, including proficiency with media tools and effective communication abilities (Barry, 2020). This method will provide space for santrists to develop critical thinking skills in order to face contemporary reality. A holistic and mutually supportive model would result in a more adaptive and inclusive pesantren in the modern era.

### **Enhancing Pesantren Management and Institutional Frameworks for Innovation and Growth**

The next multidimensionality relates to management and institutional aspects. An inherent problem found in pesantrens is Kiai-centered management with the involvement of other stakeholders. This leads to low innovation in the curriculum and teaching methodology (Asrori, 2022). This was revealed through interviews with Mr. B, a pesantren supervisor. He expressed that the root of the problem is the unprofessional management and institutions of pesantrens. So far, pesantrens have traditionally been run by kiai. Modern management paradigms and systems such as public participation, transparency, and accountability have not been optimally implemented. According to Ms. R, a local resident around pesantren, this impacts the lack of innovation in the management of the pesantren. Many

aspirations and inputs from various elements have not yet been accommodated. It is difficult to change and adjust programs according to the dynamics of time. The pesantren is less adaptive and proactive in responding to various challenges. The highly centralized management policy of pesantrens can hinder their professional development, especially in facing the growing demands of the times.

Therefore, Darul Ishlah started to increase the professionalism of pesantren management through public involvement and the use of information technology, as suggested by a previous study (Kusuma, 2021). To overcome this problem, Pesantren Darul Ishlah took strategic steps with a focus on increasing professionalism in the management of pesantrens. This involves the public in the decision-making process. By involving various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and the surrounding community, pesantrens can obtain diverse perspectives. This is expected to provide a holistic and relevant solution to the challenges faced by pesantrens. In addition, pesantren Darul Ishlah has utilized information technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of managing pesantrens. The utilization of information technology is not only limited to administrative aspects but also extended to the learning process and communication with stakeholders. Using technology, better collaboration between related parties can accelerate pesantren activities (Febrianti et al., 2023). Thus, pesantrens can gain a competitive advantage in providing quality education relevant to the times. Although changes in pesantren management and institutions require significant time and effort, the steps taken by pesantren Darul Ishlah reflect their commitment to continuously adapt to changing times.

Increasing professionalism in pesantren management through public involvement and the utilization of information technology are important strategic steps to ensure the sustainability and relevance of pesantrens in providing quality Islamic education.

Furthermore, strengthening pesantren governance can be achieved by optimizing the role of the supervisory board. The supervisory board at the pesantren is important to ensure the accountability and transparency of pesantren management (Nurhayati, 2022). Therefore, increasing the capacity and independence of the supervisory body is necessary to perform the supervisory function optimally. Irregularities in management can be minimized through an effective supervisory function.

Furthermore, a previous study conducted by Rusmini (2023) emphasized the urgency of increasing human resource competence in managing pesantrens. This can be accomplished through periodic training related to education governance, financial management, and the utilization of information technology. It will equip pesantren managers with the necessary abilities to perform their duties professionally. This will ultimately ensure that the innovation and development of pesantrens proceed optimally (Rusmini, 2023). Hermawan (2024) added that the quality management system in pesantrens is relevant for improving strategic planning, standardization, and continuous evaluation. The implementation of quality management in pesantrens can be the main support for good governance for the optimum achievement of pesantrens' vision and mission (Hermawan, 2024).

In conclusion, centralizing pesantren management around the figure of the kiai without involving multiple stakeholders can impede innovation in the curriculum and teaching. Pesantren Darul Ishlah responds to this challenge by increasing the professionalism of pesantren management through public involvement and utilization of information technology. These steps demonstrate the pesantren's commitment to continuously adapt to changing times and improve the quality of Islamic education.

### **Multidimensional Curriculum Development to Counteract Radicalism**

To ward off radicalism, curriculum development is a crucial factor that must be addressed in a multidimensional manner. Based on the results of interviews with Kiai S as the caregiver of the pesantren, it was revealed that the applied curriculum is still focused on the study of classical books using conventional learning methods. This has the potential to limit the critical thinking ability of santri in facing the current challenges. This finding is in line with Asrori's (2022) that the pesantren curriculum has not fully integrated the development of 21st century skills and critical thinking skills. To overcome this problem, Kiai S suggested the integration of classical book studies with relevant contemporary materials. In addition, he proposed training teachers to develop more interactive and critical learning methods. He emphasized the importance of adding discussions involving santri in studying modern issues.

In addition, a document study of some books taught at Pesantren Darul Ishlah indicates the content of intolerance, legitimization of violence, and anti-Western views. This finding is in line with previous studies (Basri, 2017; Kurniawan, 2019)

suggesting the counterproductive potential of teaching such classical books towards efforts to prevent radicalism. According to the interviews, this is due to the lack of contextual understanding of these books and the lack of balance with studies that contain moderation and tolerance values. To overcome this problem, Kiai S suggested training pesantren teachers on contextual interpretation relevant to modern times. In addition, he proposed curriculum integration with contemporary studies that emphasize the values of moderation and tolerance. Cooperation between pesantrens, the government, and other educational institutions also needs to be improved to enrich the perspectives and teaching materials in pesantrens. Pesantren Darul Ishlah has taken strategic steps in curriculum development. First, the curriculum was revitalized by including 21st century skills content, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. This is in line with the recommendations of a previous study (Hafidah & Suharto, 2022), which emphasizes the importance of integrating these skills into the pesantren curriculum, allowing graduates to compete in the modern era

The next step is to strengthen the study of books that emphasize the moderation and tolerance values. Based on an interview with Ustadz F as the teacher of moral studies, books such as *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, and *Bidayatul Hidayah* are now taught more intensively to balance other books that have the potential to lead to intolerance. The internalization of moderation and tolerance values through book studies can be a bulwark in preventing the spread of radicalism in pesantrens (Arifin & Mukhibat., 2021).

Pesantren Darul Ishlah also optimizes the use of technology in the learning process. Ustadzah A, the curriculum development coordinator, explained that the e-learning platform has been used to enrich santri learning resources with various content on moderation from trusted sources. Enhancing the use of information technology in pesantren education ensures that santris remain up-to-date with current developments (Kusuma, 2021).

Pesantren Darul Ishlah applied a more participatory and dialogical approach to combat radicalism. According to Ustadz W as the teacher of fiqh studies, the Sorogan method, which tends to be passive, is now combined with group discussion to improve the critical thinking skills of santri. This finding is in line with Hafidah and Suharto (2022), who suggested that the Sorogan method needs to be combined with participatory methods to prevent students from becoming passive recipients in learning.

The curriculum development in this study also involved the active participation of santri. In a forum group discussion (FGD), several Santri representatives expressed their aspirations regarding the need to include the study of contemporary issues in the pesantren curriculum. Student R from the Aliyah (Senior High School) class, for example, suggests:

“We are eager to learn how to address actual issues such as radicalism, intolerance, and hoaxes with a moderate Islamic perspective.”

The input from these students was followed by the incorporation of Contemporary Islamic Studies into the curriculum. Pesantren Darul Ishlah also involves the participation of the surrounding community in curriculum



development. This was done through a series of forums involving community leaders, parents, and representatives of civil society organizations. In one of these forums, Mr. Has, a community leader, expressed his hope:

“We hope that the pesantren curriculum will broaden santri's understanding of diversity and respect for differences, helping them avoid falling into radical and intolerant ideologies.”

This input was accommodated by strengthening the content of multicultural education in the pesantren curriculum. In addition, Pesantren Darul Ishlah collaborated with related institutions in curriculum development. One is a partnership with the National Counter-terrorism Agency (BNPT) for the deradicalization program in the educational environment. Experts from the BNPT provide training to ustadz/ustadzah on how to identify and prevent the spread of radicalism in the pesantren environment. Training materials were integrated into the pesantren curriculum, especially in Contemporary Islamic Studies and Civic Education.

To ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of the developed curriculum, Pesantren Darul Ishlah conducted periodic evaluations. According to Ustadz, as the learning evaluation coordinator, the evaluation was carried out not only on the cognitive aspects of the students, but also on the affective and psychomotor aspects.

“We use various evaluation methods such as written tests, behavioral observations, and project assessments to ensure that students understand and practice the values of moderation and tolerance”.

The evaluation results were then used to improve the curriculum. In addition to internal evaluations, Pesantren Darul Ishlah invited a team of external evaluators to assess the implementation of the curriculum. One of the external evaluator teams involved was the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. In their report, the evaluator team highlighted that Pesantren Darul Ishlah made significant efforts to develop a curriculum that is responsive to the challenges of radicalism. However, they also provided several recommendations, such as strengthening ustadz/ustadzah resources through continuous training and improving information-technology-based learning facilities. Responding to these recommendations, Pesantren Darul Ishlah was committed to improving the quality of the human resources of its teaching staff. As stated by Kiai S:

“We realize that our teachers have a central role in the successful implementation of the curriculum. Therefore, we will include them in various training and mentoring programs, organized by internal pesantren and external institutions.”

Human resource development was also conducted through advanced study programs for teachers. Some have attended postgraduate programs at various renowned universities in Indonesia and abroad. Ustadzah F, one of the alumni of the master’s program from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, said that her study experience opened new horizons in understanding moderate and tolerant Islam.

“Hopefully, I can share the knowledge I gained to transform new generation of students who have a thorough and moderate understanding of Islam,”.

Finally, Pesantren Darul Ishlah initiated a regeneration program to ensure the sustainability of curriculum development efforts that have been made. This program aims to produce young cadres who not only master Islamic sciences, but also have broad insights into contemporary issues and 21st century skills. This programme is expected to foster the regeneration of pesantren leadership to prevent radicalism.

## CONCLUSION

A multidimensional approach is crucial for countering radicalism in pesantren curriculum development. In terms of teaching materials, it is necessary to integrate moderate Islamic values, life skills, and citizenship. Learning methods should promote students' critical learning skills. This aims to instill a thorough and tolerant understanding of Islam, develop critical thinking skills, and equip students with the relevant life skills. This transformation is expected to increase innovation, transparency, and accountability in the management of pesantrens. From management and institutional aspects, it is necessary to increase the professionalism of pesantren management through public involvement and the use of information technology. In terms of regulation and supervision, it is necessary to ensure government regulation and supervision guarantying that the pesantren is free from radicalism. The role of stakeholders should be emphasized for decision-making in the curriculum. A multidimensional approach that involves various elements in a comprehensive and sustainable manner is important for preventing radicalism.

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