Review Article

Factors Contributing to Non-Compliance with Public Procurement Procedures in Zambia: A Case Study of Public Institutions in Lusaka District

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Abstract:

Public procurement is a vital process in ensuring the efficient use of government resources and promoting transparency and accountability in public service delivery. However, non-compliance with procurement laws and regulations often undermines these goals, leading to inefficiencies, corruption, and the misallocation of public funds. The aim of the study was to investigate the factors contributing to non-compliance in procurement procedures within Zambia's public sector. The study was guided by three objectives: (i) to assess the current levels of non-compliance in the procurement system in public institutions in Zambia; (ii) to identify the key factors contributing to non-compliance with public procurement procedures in public institutions within Lusaka District; and (iii) to propose practical recommendations for improving compliance with public procurement procedures in public institutions in Lusaka District. A mixed-methods approach was employed focusing on staff from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development and Road Development Agency. A sample of 134 was drawn from a population of 201 using purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data. The findings revealed significant associations between non-compliance and various challenges, including lack of transparency, corruption and institutional capacity. A moderate positive correlation (0.552) was found between non-compliance and lack of transparency, indicating that reduced transparency fosters greater procurement irregularities and diminishes public trust in the system. Similarly, a strong positive correlation (0.567) was observed between non-compliance and corruption, suggesting that higher levels of corruption within public procurement contribute to breaches in regulations, undermining fair competition and accountability. In contrast, a strong negative correlation (-0.743) between non-compliance and institutional capacity highlighted the critical need to strengthen institutional frameworks, human resources, and administrative capabilities to improve compliance with procurement regulations. The study recommended several key reforms to address the identified factors contributing to non-compliance such as promoting transparency through the enhanced adoption of electronic procurement systems, public access to procurement data, and regular audits to ensure that procurement processes are open and accessible; reinforcing anti-corruption measures including stronger enforcement of anti-bribery laws, more rigorous background checks for procurement officers, and the establishment of independent oversight bodies, as well as enhancing institutional capacity through continuous training of procurement staff, the development of clear procurement guidelines, and the provision of adequate resources for procurement departments is essential. Implementing these recommendations would help reduce non-compliance, improve the integrity

of Zambia's public procurement system, and ultimately lead to more efficient and accountable use of public funds

Introduction

This research explores the factors contributing to non-compliance with public procurement procedures in Zambia, focusing specifically on selected public institutions in Lusaka District. Public procurement is a vital process in ensuring the efficient use of government resources and promoting transparency and accountability in public service delivery. However, non-compliance with procurement laws and regulations often undermines these goals, leading to inefficiencies, corruption and the misallocation of public funds. By investigating the underlying causes of non-compliance, such as lack of awareness, corruption, political interference and inadequate enforcement, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by public institutions in adhering to procurement procedures. The findings are expected to inform policy recommendations aimed at enhancing procurement practices and strengthening institutional frameworks for better governance and public service delivery in Zambia.

Background

This study was conceived out of the idea that through proper formulation and correct implementation of public procurement policy; and through correct adherence to public finance procedures, a country can make great progress in its development agenda. Many countries around the world have embarked on different kinds of policy reforms aimed at bringing about development. One such policy is adherence to procurement regulations, which has been undertaken by many countries. Procurement processes and regulations are key in safeguarding public funds globally budgeted for promoting sustainable development (Thai, 2008). Countries worldwide have enacted and operationalized different procurement regulations so as to ensure transparency, accountability and competitiveness in the utilization of public funds (Dzuke). Public procurement is the government undertaking involving balancing scarce financial resources meant for buying of goods and services needed to support the implementation of various government activities and programmes (Sipalo, 2021). Also, the financial resources that the government uses come from tax payers. This makes these resources to be sensitive and demanding to be handled in an efficient manner, ethical, transparent, accountable and safeguarding public interest (Komakech, 2016). As a way of ensuring that the scarce resources were used prudently, governments developed numerous procurement and financial regulations. But it has been a challenge for those entrusted with the duty to spend public funds to procure goods and services to adhere to regulations put in place (Dzuke, 2015).

Zambia, equally, has developed different procurement and financial regulations to help safeguard public funds and ensure efficient delivery of goods and services to the public (Uyarra and Flanagan, 2009).

However, challenges of non- compliance to financial regulations have been numerous (Financial Intelligence Centre, 2017; Office of Auditor General, 2017; Sipalo, 2021). This, therefore, implies that there is need to address this challenge or factors contributing to non-compliance with procurement procedures and ensure safety of public funds meant for development in the procuring of goods and services.

Statement Of The Problem

Despite Zambia's efforts to safeguard public funds through the enactment and operationalization of procurement and financial regulations, such as the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020, non-compliance with these regulations remains a significant challenge. The Act mandates transparency, efficiency, and accountability in public procurement (GRZ, 2018), yet reports from the Auditor General's Office, Financial Intelligence Centre, and the Public Accounts Committee indicate widespread violations leading to misuse and loss of government funds (Auditor General's Office, 2017; Financial Intelligence Centre, 2017; National Assembly of Zambia, 2019). For example, in 2016, financial irregularities in the construction sector alone totaled ZMK 213.3 million (US$ 22.5 million), while suspicious transactions in 2017 amounted to US$ 55.96 million (Financial Intelligence Centre, 2017). Furthermore, losses in 2022 included K25.5 million in government revenue and overpayments of K110 million (Office of the Auditor General, 2022). In spite of all the above safeguards and measures to operationalize procurement and financial regulations, the government continued losing the public funds through loose or non-compliance to the procurement procedures in most government departments.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to assess the factors contributing to non-compliance in procurement procedures within Zambia's public sector. The study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the root causes of non-compliance, thereby informing policy reforms and capacity-building initiatives aimed at improving adherence to public procurement procedures within public institutions in Lusaka District.

Research Objectives

i. To assess the current levels of non-compliance in the procurement system in public institutions in Zambia.

ii. To identify the key factors contributing to non-compliance with public procurement procedures in public institutions within Lusaka District.

iii. To propose practical recommendations for improving compliance with public procurement procedures in public institutions in Lusaka District.

Research Questions

i. What is the current level of non-compliance with public procurement procedures in public institutions within Lusaka District?

ii. What are the key factors contributing to non-compliance with public procurement procedures in public institutions in Lusaka District?

iii. How can strategies be implemented to improve compliance with public procurement procedures in public institutions in Lusaka District?

Significance of the Study

The focus of most studies in Zambia has been on effect or impact of corruption on businesses and operations of organizations. There are few studies that have offered answers to question on what strategies were adopted by organizations to sustain their

organizational operations and enable stakeholder to comply with laid down regulations to put scarce resources to good use for national development. Therefore, the findings of this study will be necessary for organizations to be aware of some strategies to employ for them to stay afloat and mitigate non-compliance to set regulations. The study will also be useful to other researchers in supplementing the existing literature on the same study area and may provide a fertile ground for further research based on the gaps left out by this study.

Literature Review
Global Perspective
Public procurement is a crucial aspect of government operations worldwide, with billions of dollars spent annually on contracts for goods, services, and works. Non-compliance with public procurement procedures, however, is a challenge faced globally, leading to inefficiencies, corruption, and poor service delivery (McCrudden, 2004). Factors such as political interference, lack of transparency, weak institutional frameworks, and inadequate monitoring systems contribute to non-compliance (Thai, 2001; United Nations, 2013).

In developed countries, such as the United States and the European Union, despite having robust procurement frameworks, non-compliance remains a challenge, particularly related to the misuse of public funds and lack of accountability. For instance, in the United States, procurement fraud remains a significant problem, with various agencies reporting cases of non-compliance in procurement activities (GAO, 2020). In the European Union, despite the establishment of common procurement rules, irregularities and breaches in public procurement remain evident, particularly in member states with weaker enforcement mechanisms (European Commission, 2020).

In developing countries, non-compliance is often linked to issues like corruption, inadequate technical capacity, and poor governance structures. According to Ambe and Badenhorst-Weiss (2012), the procurement processes in South Africa face numerous challenges, including inefficiency, lack of accountability, and corruption, contributing to a high level of non-compliance.

Continental Perspective (Africa)
In Africa, public procurement remains a critical concern in ensuring transparency and value for money in government expenditure. The African Union (2018) underscores the importance of public procurement in driving economic growth and improving public service delivery across the continent. However, a consistent challenge in many African nations is the high rate of non-compliance with procurement procedures. Factors contributing to non-compliance include political interference, inadequate legal frameworks, weak institutional capacity, and corruption (OECD, 2020).

In Kenya, for example, public procurement has been riddled with cases of non-compliance due to a lack of proper monitoring mechanisms and political interference (Kariuki & Waweru, 2018). The situation is not unique to Kenya; studies on procurement practices in Uganda (Omara, 2020) and Tanzania (Rugumisa & Mchopa, 2019) highlight similar challenges, including lack of transparency, weak enforcement of procurement regulations, and inadequate training for procurement officers. These factors lead to poor contract execution, delays, and waste of public funds, undermining the effectiveness of public procurement systems.

Sub-Regional Perspective (Southern Africa)
In Southern Africa, the issue of non-compliance with public procurement procedures is also pervasive, particularly in countries like Zambia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. A study by Maphosa (2017) in Zimbabwe found that political patronage, lack of accountability, and weak oversight mechanisms are significant contributors to non-compliance in public procurement. In South Africa, despite the establishment of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), there are still cases of procurement irregularities due to poor implementation and lack of adherence to the procedures set out in the legislation (Dlamini, 2016).

Zambia, like many other countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), faces challenges in ensuring compliance with procurement regulations. The Zambia Public Procurement Authority (ZPPA) has been working to improve procurement practices, but there are still concerns regarding transparency, corruption, and political interference (Chirwa & Nhema, 2019). The slow pace of reform and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms contribute to persistent non-compliance issues in public procurement.

National Level (Zambia)
In Zambia, public procurement is governed by the Public Procurement Act (2018), which aims to promote transparency, competition, and efficiency in the procurement of goods, works, and services by public institutions. However, despite these legal frameworks, non-compliance remains a significant issue in the country. Studies on Zambian public procurement practices have pointed to several factors contributing to non-compliance, including political interference, weak institutional capacity, corruption, and lack of adequate training for procurement officials. Chilufya et al. (2020) highlight that political interference in procurement decisions has led to the awarding of contracts to unqualified suppliers, undermining the effectiveness of the procurement system. Similarly, Chisanga (2017) suggests that political influence in public procurement often results in favoritism, with contracts being awarded to firms linked to political elites, thus violating the principles of fairness and competition.

The Zambia Public Procurement Authority (ZPPA) has undertaken reforms to enhance procurement compliance, but challenges persist in enforcement. A study by Zulu (2018) found that the lack of capacity in public institutions, particularly at the local level, impedes effective procurement oversight. Public institutions in Lusaka District, in particular, face challenges related to limited technical expertise, inadequate procurement planning, and poor contract management, leading to frequent non-compliance with procurement procedures.

Furthermore, the role of procurement officers in ensuring compliance is often undermined by lack of training and inadequate resources. A survey conducted by Kalaluka and Simukonda (2021) found that procurement officers in Lusaka District public institutions often lack the necessary skills to effectively implement procurement procedures, leading to poor decision-making and non-compliance with regulations.

Conceptual framework

A **conceptual framework** is a visual or written representation of the key variables or concepts in a study and the relationships between them.
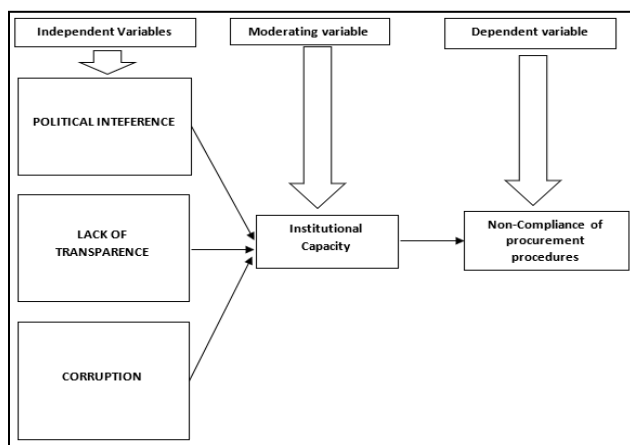
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework. Source: (Author, 2025)

Research Methodology

Research approach

Research choice referred to the nature of the study and was closely associated with the type of research. Therefore, the research choice could be categorized into three major elements: qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both, otherwise known as mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2007). The quantitative method was related to the use of numbers, with special consideration given to the implementation of statistical tools. On the contrary, qualitative research covered opinion, thought processes, and emotions (Saunders et al., 2007).

The 'Mixed-method' research was adopted for this study as it incorporated the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. According to (Saunders et al., 2007), the main advantage of using mixed methods over mono-methods was that triangulation could take place.

Target population and sample size

The target population in this study is the employees in the procurement departments and management under the three selected public institutions within Lusaka which are: The Ministry of Health (MOH) in Lusaka, Ministry of Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development and Road Development Agency. MOH has 134 employees in procurement and management, Ministry of Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development and Housing has 32 employees in procurement and management and finally Road Development Agency has 35 employee's procurement and management. The total target population is 134 employees.

Table 1: Study population stratum

Department	stry of H	RDA	stry of Infrastru	Total
Procurement	40	20	18	78
Management	94	15	14	123
Total	**134**	**35**	**32**	**201**

The sample size of the study was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = is the sample size

N = is the known population (201)

e = Margin of error (0.05)

$n = \frac{201}{1+201(0.05)^2} =$ **134 respondents**

Sampling techniques

The study used both purposive and probability sampling techniques. The target population was chosen purposively as the study focused only on the employees in the procurement department of the three (3) public institutions, and the sample size was drawn randomly among the employees using the stratified sampling technique to allow for equal chances of the respondents. Stratified sampling was a technique in which a population was divided into distinct subgroups, or strata, that shared specific characteristics. The goal was to ensure that each subgroup was adequately represented in the sample, which helped increase the precision and relevance of the results. Within each stratum, a random sample was selected, often proportional to the stratum's size relative to the entire population (Creswell, 2014).

The selection of this technique was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to use their judgment or knowledge in selecting a suitable sample size based on the set research questions and objectives. (Amadebai E, 2023), further stated that in the purposive sampling technique, the researcher used their knowledge to choose a sample that would be most helpful to the research's objectives. This sort of sampling was also known as selective or judgment sampling.

Data collection techniques

Primary data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire because the target population consisted of busy government employees who had no time for interviews, but could fill in the questionnaires during their own free time. Furthermore, the questionnaire was deemed appropriate for this study because respondents could answer the questions simultaneously, thereby shortening the time required to collect the data (Burns & Veeck, 2020). Lastly, the questionnaires were distributed using Google Forms, ensuring that the cost of printing and distributing was kept at a minimum level.

Data Analysis Instruments and Procedures

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the collected data. The collected data was electronically captured and cleaned. Relationships between variables were statistically analysed using correlation analysis, and regression analysis was carried out to establish the cause-and-effect relationship.

Results

Demographic information

The table below provides an overview of the gender distribution of the study's respondents. Out of the total sample size of 100 participants, 61% (61 respondents) are male, while 39% (39 respondents) are female. This indicates a higher representation of male respondents compared to female participants in the sample. The data shows that the gender distribution is relatively imbalanced, with males making up a larger proportion.
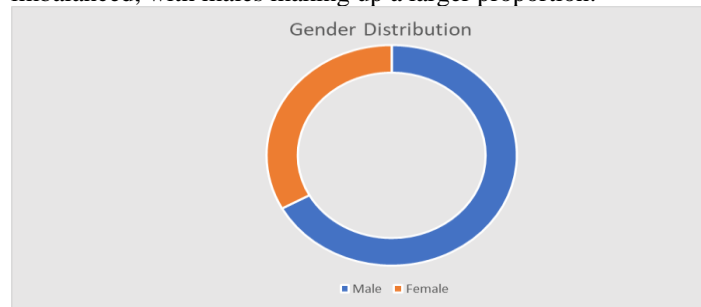
Figure 2: Distribution of Gender. Source: (Field Data, 2025)

	itical Interfere	n-compliance urement proce
Political Interference Pearson Correlation sig (2-tail) N	1 134	.644 .000 134
Non-compliance Pearson Correlation Procurement procedures Sig (2-tail) N	.644 .000 134	1 134

Educational analysis

The table shows the distribution of educational qualifications among the respondents. A small percentage of respondents, 2%, hold a certificate, while 5% have a diploma. The largest group, representing 62% of the sample, holds a degree, indicating that a significant portion of the respondents has attained higher education. Additionally, 31% of respondents possess a master's degree. This distribution reflects a sample with a high level of education, with the majority of participants having completed tertiary education. The relatively high proportion of individuals with degrees and master's degrees suggests that the respondents are likely to have a good understanding of procurement regulations and practices, which may influence the depth and quality of their responses in the study.
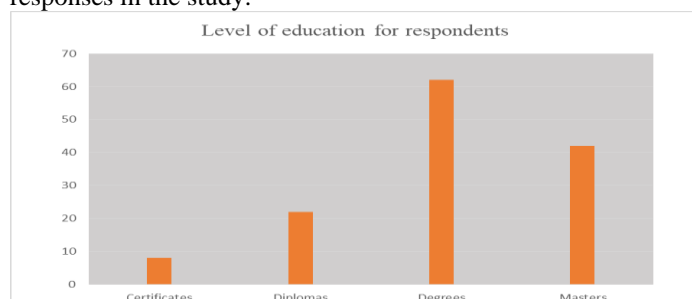
Figure 3: Respondents Level of Education. Source: (Field Data, 2025)

Descriptive statistics

The work experience distribution provides valuable insight into the respondents' professional backgrounds. The data shows that none of the respondents have less than one year of work experience, indicating that all participants have at least some levels of professional exposure. A small proportion, 17% of the sample, have between 1 and 5 years of work experience. The majority, however, have more extensive experience, with 40% having worked for 6 to 10 years. The largest group, comprising 43% of the respondents, have over 10 years of work experience. This suggests that the sample is made up primarily of individuals with considerable professional experience, which could enhance the quality and depth of their responses. Their extensive work experience may also provide valuable perspectives on the challenges and practices related to procurement regulations, particularly in terms of understanding long-term trends or systemic issues in the field.

Figure 4: Work experience. Source: (Field Data, 2025)

Inferential statistics

Correlation political interference and non-compliance in procurement procedures

The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.644 indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between political interference and non-compliance in procurement procedures. This suggests that as political interference increases, there is a corresponding increase in non-compliance within procurement practices. Essentially, the more political involvement or pressure there is in procurement decisions, the higher the likelihood that procurement processes will deviate from established regulations and procedures, leading to violations and irregularities.

Table 2: Correlation political interference and non-compliance in procurement procedures

Correlation between lack of transparency and non-compliance in procurement procedures

The Pearson correlation analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation of 0.552 between non-compliance in procurement procedures and lack of transparency, indicating that as transparency decreases, the likelihood of non-compliance increases. With a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significance threshold of 0.01, the correlation is statistically significant, suggesting that this relationship is not due to random chance. Based on 100 data points, the analysis shows that non-compliance is more likely in environments with lower transparency, aligning with the expectation that poor transparency in procurement systems fosters corruption, manipulation, and deviations from procedures. Therefore, the analysis concludes that lack of transparency is a contributing factor to non-compliance in procurement procedures, emphasizing the need to improve transparency to reduce such risks.

Table 3: Correlation between lack of transparency and non-compliance in procurement procedures

	Non - compliance in Procurement procedures	Lack of Transparency
Non-compliance in procurement procedures Pearsion Correlation Sig (2-tailed) N	1 134	.552 .000 134
Lack of Transparency Pearson Correlation Sig(2-tailed) N	.552 .000 134	1 134

Correlation between corruption and non-compliance in procurement procedures

The Pearson correlation analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation of 0.567 between non-compliance in procurement procedures and corruption. This indicates that as corruption levels increase within public institutions, the likelihood of non-compliance in procurement procedures also tends to rise. Essentially, the presence of corrupt practices such as bribery, favoritism, or unethical behavior may lead to deviations from established procurement protocols, allowing for violations that undermine transparency and accountability.

Table 4: Correlation between corruption and non-compliance in procurement procedures

	Non - compliance in Procurement procedures	Corruption
Non-compliance in procurement procedures Pearson Correlation	1	.567
Sig (2-tailed)		.000
N	134	134
Corruption Pearson Correlation	.567	1
Sig(2-tailed)	.000	
N	134	134

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the significant factors contributing to non-compliance in public procurement procedures, with a particular emphasis on the roles of transparency, corruption, and institutional capacity. The moderate positive correlation between non-compliance and lack of transparency, as well as between non-compliance and corruption, underscores the detrimental effects of poor transparency and corrupt practices on procurement integrity. Conversely, the strong negative correlation between non-compliance and institutional capacity demonstrates that strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing training, and improving resources are vital in ensuring compliance with procurement procedures. Addressing these factors through targeted reforms, such as increasing transparency, tackling corruption, and investing in institutional capacity, will be critical for improving the effectiveness of procurement systems and ensuring the efficient and accountable use of public funds in Zambia.

Recommendations

Enhance Transparency: Public procurement processes should be made more transparent by ensuring that all procurement information, including tender notices, evaluation reports, and contract awards, are publicly accessible. This will not only promote accountability but also reduce the potential for corruption and manipulation in procurement procedures. The establishment of online platforms for public procurement could facilitate easy access to relevant information for all stakeholders.

Strengthen Anti-Corruption Measures: To address the significant correlation between corruption and non-compliance, it is crucial to implement stringent anti-corruption measures within the procurement system. This includes establishing independent oversight bodies, such as an anti-corruption commission, to monitor procurement activities, investigate suspicious practices, and hold violators accountable. Additionally, creating a whistleblower protection system would encourage individuals to report unethical practices without fear of retaliation.

Build Institutional Capacity: Strengthening the capacity of public institutions involved in procurement is essential to improve compliance. This can be achieved through regular training programs for procurement officers on relevant laws, regulations, and best practices. Additionally, providing adequate resources and staffing will ensure that procurement processes are carried out effectively and in line with legal requirements. It is also essential to establish a robust internal audit mechanism to regularly review procurement activities and identify any potential non-compliance issues.

Promote Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: Public institutions should collaborate with international organizations, procurement experts, and other governments to share best practices and learn from successful procurement reforms. This can help to identify effective strategies for reducing non-compliance and improving the overall efficiency of the procurement system.

Supplementary material

The authors declare that all the data and materials used in this study are sufficiently included within the manuscript and therefore no further data or link to the data will be provided

Credit authorship contribution statement

AN: Writing – review & editing, original draft preparation, visualization, validation, software development, methodology design, investigation, data curation, conceptualization, coordination and formal analysis.

JC: Writing – review & editing, original draft preparation, visualization, software implementation, methodology development, investigation, conceptualization, formal analysis, data validation and supervisor.

MZ: Writing – review & editing, original draft preparation, visualization, software implementation, methodology development, investigation, conceptualization, formal analysis, and data validation.

JC: Writing – review & editing, supervision, resource management, project administration, conceptualization, methodology oversight, and data interpretation.

All authors read, reviewed and approved the final manuscript for publication consideration.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

As part of the master's study, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Zambia Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The clearance reference number is **HSSREC-2024-NOV-008: IORG No. 0005376 IRB No. 00006464**

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that the study was undertaken without any commercial or financial associations that could be perceived as a

potential conflict of interest.

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