

# Innovations

## Role of School-Based Counselling Programmes in Promoting National Values and Social Cohesion among Secondary School Students

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**Abstract:** *This paper highlights the crucial role of school-based counselling programmes in promoting national values and social cohesion among secondary school students in multicultural societies. It discusses how counselling interventions foster empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity, and identifies challenges such as cultural barriers and limited resources. To address these challenges, we recommend that schools integrate culturally sensitive counselling approaches into their curricula, tailoring programmes to meet the unique needs of their student populations. By doing so, schools can foster a more inclusive and cohesive learning environment that promotes national values and social responsibility.*

**Keywords:** *school-based counselling, national values, social cohesion, multicultural education.*

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### Introduction

In Nigeria's increasingly multicultural and dynamic society, fostering national values and social cohesion among high school students is critical to building a peaceful and unified nation. National values, defined as the core ethics, principles, and ideals that reflect the cultural, social, and political identity of a country, are foundational to the development of a shared national consciousness (Ismail, 2018). For Nigeria—a country with over 250 ethnic groups, more than 500 languages, and significant religious diversity—these values are crucial in bridging differences and fostering a sense of belonging among its citizens (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Social

cohesion, which refers to the capacity of diverse groups to coexist harmoniously while contributing to societal well-being, complements national values by encouraging unity in diversity (Bouma, 2016). This synergy is essential for a nation like Nigeria, where diversity is both a strength and a challenge.

Nigeria's high school population represents a microcosm of this diversity. With approximately 28.6 million students enrolled in secondary schools across the country (National Population Commission, 2023), the student body is a rich tapestry of ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. High schools, particularly in urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, Kano, and Port Harcourt, are home to students from across the country, many of whom come from vastly different cultural settings. These students bring with them a variety of perspectives, customs, and values that reflect Nigeria's multifaceted identity. This diversity provides an unparalleled opportunity to cultivate national values that promote unity, tolerance, and respect for others. It is within these educational spaces that the future of Nigeria's national identity is shaped, making schools critical arenas for promoting both social cohesion and national values (Chan & Islam, 2015).

Social cohesion in the Nigerian context is particularly important given the historical and ongoing challenges related to ethnic, religious, and regional conflicts. Nigeria has experienced significant episodes of violence rooted in these divisions, from the Biafran Civil War to more recent clashes between herders and farmers, and the rise of insurgent groups such as Boko Haram (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2019). The consequences of these conflicts are felt acutely in schools, where tensions between students from different backgrounds can sometimes mirror broader societal divides. Schools thus play a crucial role not only in academic instruction but also in peacebuilding by fostering an environment where students learn to live and work together despite their differences (Lee & Horsley, 2017).

Promoting national values such as respect for diversity, justice, and equality within the educational curriculum helps mitigate these divisions. Educational institutions serve as vital spaces for teaching the younger generation about Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and the importance of unity. Studies have shown that students exposed to curricula that emphasize national values and social cohesion are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward people from different ethnic or religious groups, reducing prejudice and fostering intergroup harmony (Hörnsten, Lindahl, Persson & Edvardsson, 2014). Furthermore, students who engage in activities that promote civic engagement, such as community service or interschool collaborations, are more likely to develop a strong sense of national pride and responsibility (Lu et al., 2021).

High school students in Nigeria, who are at a critical stage of identity formation, and the integration of national values into their educational experience can have

profound long-term effects on their sense of self and their role in society. During adolescence, students are particularly sensitive to issues of belonging, fairness, and justice, and schools provide a unique opportunity to shape their understanding of these concepts. By promoting national values that emphasize inclusivity, democracy, and respect for human rights, schools can help cultivate a generation of Nigerian citizens who are not only aware of their rights and responsibilities but also committed to contributing to the country's socio-economic development (Obanya, 2020). This is especially important as Nigeria continues to grapple with issues such as political instability, corruption, and economic inequality, which can be exacerbated by divisions within the population.

The concept of social cohesion is intertwined with national development, as a more cohesive society is better positioned to address common challenges and pursue collective goals. In the Nigerian context, fostering social cohesion in schools can help break down the ethnic, religious, and regional barriers that often hinder national progress. Schools that prioritize social cohesion initiatives, such as intercultural exchanges, group projects, and discussions on national history and values, create environments where students learn to appreciate both their shared national identity and their unique cultural backgrounds. This approach not only strengthens interpersonal relationships among students but also contributes to a broader sense of national unity (Chan & Islam, 2015). When students are encouraged to value diversity as a strength, they are more likely to grow into adults who can navigate Nigeria's complex social landscape and contribute positively to its future.

This paper discusses the intricate relationship between national values and social cohesion in Nigeria's high school system. It explores the strategies and processes that schools can use to embed these concepts in their curricula and daily activities, with the goal of fostering a generation of young Nigerians who are equipped to lead a diverse, peaceful, and prosperous nation. This paper offers insights into how schools can play a transformative role in promoting unity and progress in one of the world's most diverse nations.

### **Importance of National Values and Social Cohesion**

Individual identities are built on the foundation of national values, which give people a strong sense of purpose and belonging (Van der Merwe & Morelli, 2022). National values serve as a uniting thread in the complex mosaic of various cultures and beliefs, tying a nation's common goals and aspirations together (O'Brien & Njambi, 2012). They provide people with a framework for understanding the world, influencing their moral compass, attitudes, and behaviours. People who share these ideals become proud and devoted to their country, strengthening the bonds that bind it (Szeto, 2022). This develops a strong sense of patriotism, a sense of unity among the populace, and a dedication to preserving the principles that characterise

the country's culture. As the glue holding together the many facets of a community, social cohesiveness fortifies the ties that connect disparate groups and promotes collaboration, mutual respect, and trust (Marja, Maryna, Lidia & Olena, 2020). People in socially cohesive societies are likelier to work together, share resources, and support one another (Alhusban, Alhusban, & Al-Betawi, 2019). In this connection, fewer conflicts result from misconceptions, biases, or cultural differences. Societies foster situations where discourse and empathy triumph over dispute and animosity by promoting social cohesion (Acosta & Chica, 2018). Social cohesion shields communities from the forces of division, making them resistant to adversity and outside influences (Gordeev & Egan, 2015).

The symbiotic relationship between social cohesiveness and national ideals is essential to creating a cohesive and peaceful community (Boran, 2021). The basis for common standards and goals is established when people and communities embrace and assimilate national ideals (Anam, Degeng, Murtadho & Kuswandi, 2019). Under this shared vision, various communities live in mutual respect and understanding, valuing the diversity of customs and viewpoints. Social cohesiveness is a link between various, and social cohesiveness promotes an environment of acceptance and tolerance (Watters, Ward & Stuart, 2020). This makes people from diverse backgrounds connect, work together, and co-create while overcoming social and cultural barriers. A peaceful society is built on the interaction of social cohesiveness and national values (Engel, Kington, & Mleczko, 2013). Upholding and advancing these principles, societies create an atmosphere where people feel empowered, communities are resilient, and a common feeling of belonging is prevalent (Engel, Rutkowski & Rutkowski, 2014). In the modern world, peaceful coexistence is essential since it improves people's lives and makes a significant difference in the advancement, stability, and prosperity of entire nations. Previous research findings (Engel, Rutkowski & Rutkowski, 2014; Mayes & Byrd, 2022) have examined school counselling from various angles, including how it affects social integration, academic achievement, and mental health. Although the current body of research offers a strong basis, there is still a significant knowledge vacuum regarding how these programmes support students' development of national values and social cohesiveness (Mayes & Byrd, 2022).

Delineating a targeted investigation into the function of school-based counselling programmes in advancing social cohesion and national ideals is vital. The effects of these programmes on individual students have been acknowledged in some past studies (Ruto, 2022; Mayes & Byrd, 2022). Nothing is known about how they might operate as catalysts for greater societal harmony. It is important to understand how these counselling programmes can actively support the development of a sense of national identity and social unity, especially in light of the growing diversity of educational settings and the demand for inclusive environments.

In a data-driven and research-driven society, it is imperative to base counselling and educational initiatives on empirical evidence. This calls for a significant emphasis on evidence-based methodologies to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of interventions in education and counselling. This evidence-based strategy guarantees that procedures and policies put in place in educational institutions have a practical impact in addition to being sound theoretically (Bloodworth, 2020). Educational stakeholders can maximise the benefits of school-based counselling programmes and strengthen their role in fostering national values and social cohesiveness among students by making educated decisions based on evidence.

This discourse is motivated by the need to evaluate and compile the body of research on the relationship between social cohesiveness, national values, and school-based counselling programmes. The main goal of this discourse is to examine how school-based counselling programmes support students' development of a sense of social cohesion and national identity. The goal is to elucidate how counselling programmes affect students' perceptions of their national identity and capacity for peaceful coexistence in a multicultural community. While pursuing this investigation, it will also uncover trends, gaps, and best practices that are common in the sector.

### **Theoretical Framework on National Values and Social Cohesion**

To understand the complex dynamics between national values and social cohesion, this paper draws on several theoretical frameworks. Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT) developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, Social Identity Theory explores how individuals classify themselves and others into social groups based on perceived similarities and differences (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT elucidates the cognitive processes underpinning in-group favoritism and out-group prejudice. According to this theory, individuals derive a sense of self and belonging from the groups they are part of, and this social identity significantly influences their attitudes and behaviors towards others. SIT helps in understanding how national values can be internalized through group affiliations and how these values shape intergroup dynamics within a diverse student population.

Social Capital Theory (SCT) was introduced by Robert Putnam in 1993, Social Capital Theory emphasizes the value of social networks, relationships, reciprocity, and trust within a community (Putnam, 1993). SCT posits that social connections and interactions are vital resources that can facilitate the development of human capital and enhance collective well-being. In educational settings, SCT has been linked to improved student outcomes and greater academic success by fostering supportive peer relationships and collaborative environments (Gundelach & Traunmüller, 2014).

This theory highlights how building strong social networks and trust among students can reinforce national values and promote social cohesion.

Cultural Competence Theory (CCT) underscores the importance of understanding, respecting, and valuing diverse cultural backgrounds to foster social cohesion (Cross, 1988). CCT suggests that individuals with high cultural competence are better equipped to communicate and collaborate effectively with people from various cultural backgrounds, thereby promoting inclusivity and reducing prejudice (Leyerzapf & Abma, 2017). By integrating cultural competence into school-based counselling programs, educators can enhance students' ability to appreciate and navigate cultural differences, thus reinforcing social cohesion and shared national values.

The integration of SIT, SCT, and CCT provides a multifaceted approach to understanding how school-based counselling programs can effectively promote national values and social cohesion among students from diverse backgrounds

### **School-Based Counselling Within Theoretical Frameworks**

School-based counsellors play an essential role in shaping students' social, emotional, and academic development, particularly in diverse educational settings. Their responsibilities go beyond providing emotional support and guidance; they also promote a sense of belonging, inclusion, and shared values among students from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (Harrison, 2019). Counsellors work to create safe, supportive environments where students can express themselves freely while learning to respect others' perspectives. In this capacity, they are critical in helping students navigate the complexities of identity, social relationships, and cultural diversity.

The role of school-based counsellors also includes facilitating personal development, conflict resolution, and the cultivation of social skills that contribute to a harmonious school community (Killen & Rutland, 2022). By promoting positive interactions, they encourage respect, empathy, and understanding, which are foundational for fostering social cohesion. Through individual and group counselling, school-based counsellors address issues such as bullying, prejudice, and conflict, all of which can arise from misunderstandings or differences among students. Their interventions help reduce biases and promote more inclusive behaviors, ultimately contributing to a peaceful and cohesive school environment (Levitt, Grubaugh, Maderick, & Deever, 2023).

Counsellors can maximize their impact by utilizing key theoretical frameworks to guide their interventions. Specifically, Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Cultural Competence Theory provide valuable lenses through which school-based counsellors can promote national values and social cohesion.

School-based counsellors can apply Social Identity Theory to help students develop a positive sense of self while fostering a shared national identity (Brannon & Lin, 2021). Tajfel's theory suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from the groups to which they belong. By emphasizing common national values, such as respect for diversity, civic engagement, and unity, counsellors can help students view themselves as part of a larger, cohesive group—the nation. For example, counsellors can facilitate group activities that highlight shared cultural or civic experiences, fostering a sense of belonging to the broader national community. These activities can help reduce intergroup prejudices by creating a common identity that transcends ethnic or cultural differences (Harrison, 2019). Counsellors can also guide discussions on how personal identities relate to the national collective, helping students integrate their unique backgrounds into a shared national framework.

Social Capital Theory emphasizes the value of social networks, trust, and reciprocity in building cohesive communities (Putnam, 2000). In the school setting, counsellors can utilize this theory by encouraging activities that promote trust and cooperation among students from different backgrounds. Group projects, team-building exercises, and community service initiatives help students from diverse cultural and social groups build relationships based on mutual respect and shared goals. By fostering these connections, counsellors help to increase the social capital within the school, enhancing students' sense of community and belonging. This in turn strengthens social cohesion as students are more likely to form bonds across cultural lines, reducing biases and stereotypes (Zihnioglu & Dalkiran, 2022). Counsellors can also encourage students to engage in civic-minded activities that build their sense of responsibility towards their community and nation.

School-based counsellors play a critical role in promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity. Cultural Competence Theory focuses on the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultures, and counsellors can use this framework to help students navigate a diverse social environment (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). Through counselling sessions, workshops, and peer discussions, counsellors can foster an inclusive culture within the school by teaching students to appreciate and respect cultural differences. Culturally appropriate counselling programs have been found to positively affect social cohesiveness and national ideals (Gray & Rubel, 2018; Sink, 2016). This involves understanding and respecting the cultural backgrounds of students, including their different practices, beliefs, and values. Counsellors tailor their approaches to align with students' cultural norms and values, addressing cultural factors that influence mental health and well-being. Building trust and rapport with clients from diverse backgrounds is fundamental, ensuring that counselling is effective and sensitive to individual needs (Bengoa, Ganassali et al., 2018).

Peer mentoring and group discussions are effective interventions linked to successful counselling programs, emphasizing active student participation (Chan & Islam, 2015). Additionally, cooperative initiatives involving communities, families, and schools enhance social cohesion and support the development of national values. Despite these benefits, variations in program length, intensity, and cultural contexts lead to discrepancies in research findings (Tum, 2020; Gray & Rubel, 2018; Sink, 2016). The lack of long-term studies on the impact of counselling programs on social cohesion and national values, especially in developing countries, highlights the need for further research. Studies using qualitative methods, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, provide valuable insights into students' perspectives and experiences with counselling programs (Hala & Durrani, 2018). Quantitative measures of changes in attitudes, behaviors, and social interactions are also essential for evaluating the effectiveness of these programs (Maleku, Kim, & Lee, 2019; Kay, Muola, & Ondima, 2019). Future research should address cultural biases in evaluation instruments and techniques to provide a more accurate understanding of the long-term impact of school-based counselling interventions.

By grounding their work in these theoretical frameworks, school-based counsellors can effectively nurture both social cohesion and national values in a diverse student population. Their role in facilitating communication, building trust, and promoting cultural competence is crucial in creating a school environment where students feel a sense of belonging and pride in their national identity (Levitt, Grubaugh, Maderick, & Deever, 2023). Counsellors help students bridge cultural divides by fostering dialogue and understanding, reducing the biases that often arise in diverse settings (Killen & Rutland, 2022). By promoting national values, such as empathy, civic responsibility, and tolerance, they prepare students to become engaged and socially responsible citizens who contribute to a cohesive society. Moreover, long-term counselling programs that emphasize the continuous development of these skills are particularly effective in instilling lasting values and reducing intergroup tensions (Harrison, 2019).

Through their targeted interventions and thoughtful application of these theoretical frameworks, school-based counsellors are essential in promoting unity, diversity, and a strong sense of national identity among students, laying the groundwork for a more harmonious society.

### **School-Based Counselling Programmes and Promotion of National Values and Social Cohesion**

Counselling programmes offered in schools provide students with a transforming experience by teaching them to understand and appreciate the experiences and viewpoints of others. Learners cultivate profound empathy through facilitated

dialogues, role-playing activities, and authentic case studies. In addition to actively combating prejudices, stereotypes, and biases, counselling interventions also promote a climate of tolerance. Students learn to respect and value the diversity of cultures, religions, and traditions when safe spaces for open discussion are provided, establishing the groundwork for a community where differences are valued rather than used as a source of division (Gray & Rubel, 2018). Counselling programmes use multicultural counselling approaches, narrative therapy, and cognitive-behavioural strategies. Through self-reflection, these techniques help students become aware of their prejudices and presumptions, fostering empathy for others. Counselling programmes emphasise the common humanity among varied people and provide students with the emotional intelligence to negotiate difficult social environments. This promotes national ideals that are based on empathy and understanding (Engel, Rutkowski, & Rutkowski, 2014).

Counselling programmes offered in schools are essential for helping students feel like they belong. Counsellors encourage students to explore their identities, including their cultural backgrounds and national heritage, through individual and group counselling sessions (Szeto, 2022). Counsellors offer affirmation, guaranteeing that each student's individuality is recognised and valued. Self-worth and self-esteem are raised by this validation, which fosters a keen sense of community inside the school and in society (Ibili & Billinghamurst, 2019). Counselling programmes encourage conversations on common national stories and historical occurrences so that students can make the connection between their identities and the larger national identity (Tum, 2020). When children understand their contributions to the national fabric, they also grow to feel a strong sense of pride and belonging. This blending of national and personal identity strengthens national ideals that place a premium on solidarity and pride in the country. It also fosters a sense of shared purpose.

School-based counselling programmes include workshops, joint projects, and multicultural activities to foster beneficial intergroup interactions. Students from all backgrounds participate in meaningful exchanges and learn from one another's experiences and viewpoints through these activities. These exchanges destroy preconceptions and stereotypes, promoting respect and understanding among people (Leyerzapf & Abma, 2017; Qazi & Shah, 2019). Counselling programmes foster a sense of camaraderie among students by encouraging collaborative participation in extracurricular activities, academic projects, and community service, regardless of their cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Counselling programmes facilitate peaceful coexistence, ensuring that differences do not cause division but add to the school community's richness. Counselling interventions include teaching students effective communication skills and negotiation techniques and providing them with the tools to navigate disagreements respectfully (Liaga & Wielenga, 2020). A key element of

counselling programmes offered in schools is conflict resolution. Counsellors resolve interpersonal disputes by addressing underlying problems from prejudice or cultural misunderstandings. Conflicting parties are encouraged to voice their opinions and feelings through facilitated dialogues, which develop empathy and advance understanding between the parties. These mediation sessions not only settle issues right away but also provide students with the tools they need to resolve conflicts positively in the future (Acosta & Chica, 2018; Boran, 2021).

Counselling programmes include diversity and cultural competency education modules. These programmes dispel myths, offer factual knowledge about many cultures, and inspire students to recognise the importance of diversity. Counselling programmes build a foundation of understanding and acceptance, promoting social cohesion (Chan & Islam, 2015; Anyi, 2017). They enable students to accept the cause of inclusivity and actively participate in building a cohesive and peaceful community. School-based counselling programmes develop empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity while helping students feel like they belong and have an identity. As a result, they function as catalysts for advancing national ideals (Borg & Borg, 2015). These programmes handle problems, foster understanding among varied student populations, and facilitate positive intergroup relationships, improving social cohesion. Using these many strategies, counselling programmes help people become more well-rounded and essential in creating a society where social cohesion and national values are lived realities rather than just ideas (Lee & Horsley, 2017).

### **Challenges Faced by School-Based Counselling Programmes**

Significant challenges school-based counselling programmes face are navigating cultural and ethnic barriers within diverse student populations and cultural differences (Sue & Sue, 2013). Themes related to navigating these barriers within diverse student populations and cultural differences in school-based counselling programmes may include cultural competence, communication, diversity and inclusion, and cultural awareness (Wigelsworth et al., 2012). Cultural competence is a crucial theme in school-based counselling programs as it involves counsellors understanding and respecting students' cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Also, cultural competence requires counsellors to recognise and address their biases, as these biases can impact their interactions with students from diverse backgrounds (McCarthy, 2001). When a counsellor actively works to understand and respect the cultural diversity of their students while also addressing their own biases, it can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students (Gay, 2000).

Effective communication is crucial in counselling and addressing cultural and ethnic barriers (Epstein et al., 2018). Counsellors must communicate clearly and

respectfully with students from diverse cultural backgrounds to establish trust and build rapport (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). When a counsellor fosters open and respectful communication, it can bridge cultural divides and create a supportive environment for all students (Cohen, 2009). Cultural awareness is crucial for counsellors to provide culturally sensitive support to students (Sue & Sue, 2013). When counsellors understand the cultural norms and practices of the individuals they work with, it will help them recognise how cultural differences may affect students' mental health and well-being (Kleinman, 1988). There will be a need to address these concerns because school-based counselling programmes can better help navigate cultural and ethnic barriers within diverse student populations and promote a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students (Maleku, Kim, & Lee, 2019).

Misunderstandings resulting from linguistic, cultural, and traditional differences might impede the efficacy of communication and action (Ramzy & Ashaari, 2018). Deep ingrained cultural conventions may affect students' desire to participate in counselling, especially when discussing delicate subjects like social cohesion and national identity (Maleku, Kim, & Lee, 2019). Counsellors must be culturally competent to overcome these obstacles; they must be aware of the subtle differences between different cultures, even within the same country and adjust their methods accordingly (Sue & Sue, 2013). School-based counselling programmes frequently struggle with a lack of finance and qualified staff, particularly in developing nations (Wigelsworth et al., 2012). Inadequate funding, particularly in Nigeria, where counselling programmes receive no funding, may impact the implementation of comprehensive counselling initiatives (Ramzy & Ashaari, 2018). Insufficient institutional support can also result from legislators and stakeholders in education being unaware of the critical role that counselling plays in advancing social cohesion and national ideals (Ramzy & Ashaari, 2018). To overcome these obstacles, advocacy work is required to get funds and raise awareness of the value of counselling in a larger educational setting (Epstein et al., 2018).

### **Recommendation**

Based on the discourse in this paper, we suggest that schools establish effective counselling centres managed by professionals with experience in evidence-based programmes that teach societal values and social cohesion (Wigelsworth et al., 2012). These professionals should possess skills in counselling interventions sensitive to cultural differences, enabling them to connect with pupils from diverse backgrounds (Sue & Sue, 2013). Furthermore, policymakers must acknowledge the critical role of school-based counselling programmes in fostering social harmony and allocate sufficient funds and institutional support to integrate them into the curriculum (Greenberg et al., 2017). Collaboration between stakeholders, including

government agencies, ministries of education, educators, parents, counsellors, and community leaders, is also crucial to ensure the success of these programs (Epstein et al., 2018).

### Conclusion

This comprehensive discourse underscored the pivotal role of school-based counselling programmes in cultivating social cohesiveness and promoting national values among students. The discussion highlighted several crucial aspects of counselling programmes in multicultural school settings, emphasizing their significance in fostering tolerance, empathy, and respect for diversity. The paper illustrated how counselling programmes facilitate constructive intergroup contacts, bridging cultural divides and promoting social cohesion among student groups. Effective conflict resolution strategies were also identified as a critical component of counselling programs, enabling pupils to navigate differences and challenges in a peaceful and respectful manner. The discussion acknowledged the challenges hindering the effectiveness of school-based counselling programs, including cultural barriers and limited resources. To address these challenges, strategic recommendations were proposed for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts and evidence-based approaches. By integrating counselling programmes into school curricula and promoting collaboration among stakeholders, educators can create inclusive learning environments that nurture socially responsible, empathetic, and cohesive student communities. This, in turn, can foster a more harmonious and united society, where diversity is celebrated and national values are upheld.

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