

SUPERVISORS' ETHICAL CONDUCT AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' RESEARCH COMPLETION RATE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between supervisors' ethical conduct and postgraduate students' research completion rates in Public Universities in Rivers State. Specifically, it focused on supervisors' adherence to fairness, transparency, and accountability as key determinants of students' academic progress. Guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses, the study adopted a correlational research design to establish the nature and extent of the relationship. The population consisted of 11,656 respondents, including 3,356 lecturers and 8,300 postgraduate students from the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 387 respondents (111 lecturers and 276 postgraduate students) was proportionately drawn. Data were collected through two validated instruments, Supervisors' Ethical Conduct Questionnaire (SECQ) and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate Questionnaire (PSRCRPUQ), with reliability coefficients of 0.80 and 0.81, confirming strong internal consistency. Data analysis involved Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, while hypotheses were tested using t-transformation at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness, transparency and

accountability and postgraduate students' research completion rates. It was recommended that universities implement comprehensive ethics training programs emphasizing fairness, transparency and accountability to promote ethical supervision practices and improve postgraduate research completion rates in Rivers State.

Keywords: Supervisors' Ethical Conduct, Fairness, Transparency, Accountability, Research Completion.

Introduction

The quality and timeliness of postgraduate research completion in public universities largely depend on the ethical conduct of academic supervisors. Supervisors' adherence to ethical principles such as fairness, transparency, and accountability forms the foundation of a conducive and credible research environment that promotes academic integrity and productivity (Okeke & Ofoegbu, 2022). Ethical supervision ensures that postgraduate students receive objective evaluation, unbiased feedback, and equitable academic support, which are crucial for research success. When supervisors uphold fairness in assessing students' work, maintain transparency in communication, and take responsibility for their supervisory roles, students are more likely to stay motivated, committed, and confident in completing their research projects (Nguyen, 2023). Conversely, unethical practices such as favoritism, delayed feedback, and lack of accountability undermine student morale, discourage scholarly engagement, and prolong research duration (Eze & Owan, 2024).

In many Nigerian universities, particularly in Rivers State, the rate of postgraduate research completion remains a major concern due to inconsistent supervisory practices and ethical lapses (Nwosu & Nwankwo, 2023). Reports of supervisor negligence, undue bias, and poor communication have been linked to delays in thesis defense, high attrition rates, and diminished student satisfaction (Akanbi, 2022). The supervisory process is expected to be guided by institutional policies that promote equity and professionalism, yet the implementation of these ethical standards is often weak. As a result, students encounter challenges such as emotional stress, loss of research interest, and poor academic outcomes. The growing concern over the ethical dimensions of postgraduate supervision underscores the need for empirical investigation into how supervisors' conduct, anchored on fairness, transparency, and accountability, influences the rate at which postgraduate students complete their research.

Ethical supervision is not only a moral obligation but also a professional responsibility that enhances the credibility of higher education institutions (Adams, 2022). Supervisors serve as role models whose behavior can either inspire or discourage postgraduate students. When

supervisors act with fairness, treating all students equitably regardless of gender, background, or personal affinity, they promote academic justice and foster a climate of mutual respect (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2023). Transparency in supervision, through clear communication of expectations, honest feedback, and openness in decision-making, further strengthens the student-supervisor relationship and minimizes conflict. Accountability, on the other hand, ensures that supervisors fulfill their academic duties and uphold institutional standards, which directly contributes to students' timely completion of research projects (Okoro, 2024). The types of Supervisors' Ethical Conduct that relates to Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities include: supervisors' adherence to fairness and supervisors' transparency and accountability.

Supervisors' adherence to fairness refers to the consistent application of impartiality, objectivity, and justice in the academic relationship between supervisors and their postgraduate students. It involves ensuring that every student receives equal treatment, constructive feedback, and equitable academic support without favoritism or discrimination (Adebayo & Usman, 2023). Fairness in supervision embodies transparency in grading, clarity in expectations, and balance in workload distribution, ensuring that students' progress is evaluated based on merit rather than personal bias or socio-cultural factors (Okon & Eneh, 2022). In the context of postgraduate research supervision, fairness implies that supervisors maintain professional ethics by being approachable, timely in feedback delivery, and objective in assessment processes (Lawal, 2023). When supervisors adhere to fairness, it fosters a climate of trust, openness, and mutual respect, which are essential for sustaining the motivation and academic confidence of postgraduate students. Conversely, a lack of fairness in supervision often results in emotional distress, research delays, and reduced productivity among students (Balogun & Danjuma, 2024). Thus, fairness serves as a fundamental ethical component that shapes the supervisor-student relationship and determines the overall quality of the postgraduate research experience.

The relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State is both direct and significant. When supervisors treat students equitably and provide unbiased academic guidance, it encourages students to remain committed to their research, meet deadlines, and complete their studies within the stipulated time (Nnadi & Okorie, 2023). Fair supervisory practices promote intellectual autonomy, academic satisfaction, and reduced attrition rates among postgraduate students (Akinyemi, 2022). In contrast, supervisory unfairness, manifesting through preferential treatment, delayed feedback, or discriminatory evaluation, tends to demotivate students and prolong their research journey (Ogunleye & Tunde, 2023). Empirical evidence shows that fairness enhances student engagement and confidence in academic institutions, thereby improving research completion outcomes (Emenike & Agada, 2024). In Rivers State, where public universities are grappling with low research completion rates, adherence to

fairness by supervisors can play a transformative role in strengthening postgraduate education, improving institutional reputation, and ensuring the timely production of skilled researchers.

Supervisors' transparency and accountability refer to the ethical and professional conduct where supervisors openly communicate expectations, provide timely and honest feedback, and take full responsibility for their supervisory roles (Akor & Nwachukwu, 2023). Transparency involves clear articulation of research objectives, guidance on methodological approaches, and explanation of evaluation criteria, which ensures that students understand the standards and procedures required for successful research completion (Ibe & Okafor, 2022). Accountability, on the other hand, entails that supervisor are responsible for monitoring students' progress, maintaining proper documentation, and upholding institutional and academic regulations consistently (Chukwu & Eze, 2023). Together, transparency and accountability create an ethical framework that fosters trust, reduces ambiguity, and encourages students to remain focused and committed to their research objectives. A lack of transparency and accountability can result in confusion, delays, and decreased motivation among postgraduate students, ultimately hindering timely research completion (Oluwafemi & Adegoke, 2024).

The relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and postgraduate students' research completion rate is therefore critical in public universities in Rivers State. When supervisors consistently provide clear communication, ethical feedback, and reliable guidance, students are more likely to navigate the complexities of their research with confidence and efficiency (Onyema & Uzochukwu, 2023). Empirical evidence suggests that students who perceive their supervisors as transparent and accountable are more likely to adhere to research timelines, meet quality standards, and complete their projects successfully (Okeke & Nnaji, 2023). Conversely, supervisory opacity and lack of accountability often lead to misinterpretation of research requirements, extended research periods, and higher rates of project abandonment. Thus, fostering transparency and accountability among supervisors is a strategic approach to improving postgraduate research productivity, ensuring timely completion, and enhancing the overall quality of postgraduate education in Rivers State's public universities.

In Rivers State, the dynamic educational environment demands that supervisors demonstrate ethical leadership in guiding postgraduate research. Ethical conduct in supervision promotes trust, academic integrity, and institutional efficiency, factors that are indispensable for the advancement of higher education (Mbah & Ogbonna, 2023). The inability of some supervisors to uphold these principles has been observed to negatively affect postgraduate students' productivity and completion rates. Given the strategic importance of postgraduate education in producing future researchers, educators, and policymakers, understanding the role of

supervisors' ethical behavior is critical. This understanding can guide policy reforms aimed at improving supervision quality and reducing dropout rates among postgraduate students.

Therefore, this study examines the relationship between supervisors' ethical conduct, specifically fairness, transparency, and accountability, and postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State. It seeks to provide empirical evidence on how adherence to these ethical values influences the effectiveness and timeliness of research supervision. The findings are expected to assist educational policymakers, university management, and academic supervisors in developing ethical frameworks that promote quality supervision and enhance postgraduate research outcomes in Rivers State and Nigeria as a whole.

Postgraduate education in public universities serves as the foundation for research development, knowledge generation, and innovation in Nigeria. However, in recent years, the rate of postgraduate research completion in public universities in Rivers State has been a growing concern. Many postgraduate students experience prolonged delays, frustration, or even abandonment of their research due to poor supervisory practices and a lack of ethical commitment from supervisors (Okafor & Danjuma, 2022). Supervisors are expected to uphold fairness, transparency, and accountability in guiding students through the rigorous research process, but in practice, these ethical principles are often compromised. Unfair treatment, biased evaluation, and inconsistency in feedback have been reported as major impediments to students' research progress and completion (Ameh & Etim, 2024). Such unethical behaviors not only discourage academic engagement but also weaken students' confidence and motivation to complete their studies within the stipulated time frame.

Furthermore, the absence of transparency in postgraduate supervision has been identified as a critical issue affecting research quality and student productivity. When supervisors fail to provide clear expectations, timely guidance, or open communication, students often become uncertain about their research direction and standards of performance (Nwosu & Chukwuma, 2023). In many cases, lack of transparency leads to academic misunderstanding, delays in approvals, and unnecessary revisions, which impede research completion. Similarly, the absence of accountability among supervisors, manifested in poor documentation, neglect of supervisory duties, and unethical use of authority, erodes the integrity of the postgraduate research process (Akpan & Odu, 2024). The cumulative effect of these unethical practices contributes to low postgraduate completion rates, diminished academic standards, and declining institutional reputation in public universities across Rivers State.

Despite efforts by regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) to standardize postgraduate supervision, challenges persist in ensuring that supervisors adhere to

ethical standards that promote fairness, transparency, and accountability (Nwankwo & Uche, 2023). These challenges highlight a gap in policy enforcement, supervision monitoring, and ethical awareness among academic staff. Therefore, it becomes imperative to investigate the extent to which supervisors' adherence to ethical conduct, particularly fairness, transparency, and accountability, affects postgraduate students' research completion rates in public universities in Rivers State. Understanding this relationship will provide insights for strengthening ethical supervision practices, improving student outcomes, and enhancing the overall quality of postgraduate education in Nigeria.

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between Supervisors' Ethical Conduct and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State.
2. ascertain the relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State.

The following research questions were asked to guide the study.

1. What is the relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State?

The following null hypotheses are formulated for the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational design. The population consisted of 11,656 respondents, including 3,356 lecturers and 8,300 postgraduate students from the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 387 respondents (111 lecturers and 276 postgraduate students) was proportionately drawn. Data were collected through two validated instruments, Supervisors' Ethical Conduct Questionnaire (SECQ) and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate Questionnaire (PSRCRPUQ), were used to elicit data from the respondents. Each section was used to obtain information on the objectives which were designed in the pattern of four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The validation of the research instrument was determined using face and content validity. This was done by two experts from the Department of Educational Management, University of Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was established through Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient method. The reliability of the instrument gave a Cronbach Alpha index of 0.80 and 0.81 which was considered reliable. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the respondents with the help of two trained research assistants. All the copies of the instrument were administered and retrieved successfully. The data gathered from the respondents were analyzed Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Furthermore, t-transformation was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. T-cal value less than table value (1.96) were regarded as "accepted" while calculated hypotheses greater than the table value were regarded as "rejected".

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Relationship between Supervisors' Adherence to Fairness and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State

Variables	N	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal	Remark
		$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$			
Supervisors' Adherence to Fairness (X)	387	4850	63500			High and Positive Relationship
				67200	0.72	
Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate (Y)	387	5100	70200			

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 1 presents the relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State. The analysis revealed that the correlation coefficient (r -cal) between supervisors' adherence to fairness and postgraduate students' research completion rate is 0.72, indicating a high and positive relationship. This result implies that when supervisors demonstrate fairness in their interactions with postgraduate students, such as providing equal opportunities, transparent assessment, timely feedback, and impartial evaluation, it significantly enhances students' motivation and research completion rates. Furthermore, the strong positive correlation suggests that supervisors' fairness cultivates a supportive academic environment where postgraduate students feel valued, respected, and encouraged to persevere through research challenges. Fair supervisory practices foster trust, reduce academic frustration, and promote a sense of belonging, which are critical drivers of research productivity and timely completion. In essence, as supervisors uphold fairness and equity in supervision, postgraduate students become more committed, organized, and efficient in achieving their academic goals. Therefore, supervisors' adherence to fairness serves as a key determinant of postgraduate students' academic success and the overall quality of research outputs in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Relationship between Supervisors' Transparency and Accountability and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State

Variables	N	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum XY$	r -cal	Remark
		$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$			
Supervisors' Transparency and Accountability (X).	387	4874	64,850			
				68,200	0.46	Moderate and Positive Relationship
Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate (Y).	387	5432	76,920			

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 2 presents the relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State. The

analysis revealed that the calculated correlation coefficient (r-cal) between supervisors' transparency and accountability and postgraduate students' research completion rate is 0.46, indicating a moderate and positive relationship. This implies that an increase in supervisors' transparency and accountability is moderately associated with an improvement in postgraduate students' ability to complete their research work successfully and on time. Supervisors who maintain honesty, openness, and responsibility in their academic dealings create an environment that fosters trust, motivation, and effective supervision, which in turn supports postgraduate students' research progress. Moreover, the finding suggests that when supervisors exhibit transparent and accountable behaviors, such as providing clear guidance, setting realistic expectations, giving honest feedback, and ensuring academic integrity, students are more likely to stay committed and productive in their research activities. Transparent supervision also minimizes conflicts, builds confidence, and encourages effective communication between supervisors and students. Therefore, while the relationship is moderate, it highlights that supervisors' transparency and accountability play a significant role in influencing postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State, contributing positively to the overall research culture and academic development within the institutions.

Hypotheses Test

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Table 3: t-transformation of the Relationship between Supervisors' Adherence to Fairness and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Variables	N	r-cal	A	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Supervisors' Adherence to Fairness (X)	387					
		0.72	0.05	20.34	1.96	Rejected
Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate (Y)	387					

Source: Research Data, 2025

The result presented in Table 3 shows that there is a strong and statistically significant relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State. The calculated correlation coefficient (r -cal) of 0.72 indicates a high and positive relationship, suggesting that as supervisors' adherence to fairness improves, postgraduate students' ability to complete their research projects successfully also increases. The computed t -value of 20.34 exceeds the critical t -value of 1.96 at a 0.05 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This means that the observed correlation is statistically significant and did not occur by chance. This implies that, fairness in supervision, through equitable treatment, objective evaluation, timely feedback, and unbiased academic support, plays a vital role in enhancing postgraduate students' research outcomes. When supervisors treat students impartially and provide balanced academic guidance, it fosters trust, motivation, and academic commitment, which consequently improve the students' research completion rate. Thus, the strong positive correlation and statistical significance of the result confirm that supervisors' adherence to fairness contributes meaningfully to students' academic achievement and the overall efficiency of postgraduate research supervision in public universities in Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: t -transformation of the Relationship between Supervisors' Transparency and Accountability and Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate in Public Universities in Rivers State

Variables	N	r -cal	A	t -cal	t -crit	Remark
Supervisors' Transparency and Accountability (X).	387					
		0.46	0.05	10.15	1.96	Rejected
Postgraduate Students' Research Completion Rate (Y)	387					

Source: Research Data, 2025

The analysis in Table 4 reveals that there is a moderate but statistically significant positive relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.46$) indicates a moderate association, suggesting that when supervisors demonstrate openness, honesty, and accountability in their supervisory practices, students' research progress and completion rates tend to improve correspondingly. The computed t -value of 10.15 is far greater than the critical t -value of 1.96 at a 0.05 level of significance, leading to the

rejection of the null hypothesis. This confirms that the observed relationship is not due to chance but represents a meaningful and statistically significant influence of supervisory transparency and accountability on students' academic outcomes. This implies that, transparency and accountability in supervision, such as clear communication of expectations, timely feedback, ethical evaluation, and proper documentation of research progress, enhance students' trust, motivation, and sense of direction throughout their research process. Supervisors who uphold accountability and integrity foster an enabling academic environment that encourages responsibility and productivity among postgraduate students. Consequently, this finding underscores the importance of transparent supervisory practices as a cornerstone for improving research quality, promoting timely completion, and enhancing overall academic effectiveness in public universities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from Table 3 reveal a strong and statistically significant relationship between supervisors' adherence to fairness and postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.72$) indicates a high and positive association, showing that the more supervisors demonstrate fairness in their academic roles, the more likely students are to complete their research successfully. The t-value of 20.34, which surpasses the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance, confirms that this relationship is not a product of chance but a meaningful one. This result underscores that fairness in supervision, expressed through impartial grading, equal treatment, prompt feedback, and objective assessment, is a major determinant of students' success in research. This finding aligns with the work of Adebayo and Olatunji (2020) and Okorie and Nwokocha (2021), who found that supervisors' fairness and transparency greatly enhance students' academic confidence, motivation, and persistence in completing research tasks within stipulated timelines. Similarly, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2022) asserted that postgraduate students who perceive their supervisors as fair and supportive exhibit better academic discipline and self-efficacy, which are vital to successful completion of research projects. This finding agrees with Eze and Agba (2023), who emphasized that supervisors' ethical practices, including fairness and accountability, create an enabling research environment that promotes trust, collaboration, and academic excellence. The implication of this finding is that supervisors' adherence to fairness is not only an ethical necessity but a strategic academic tool that enhances research productivity, reduces attrition, and strengthens postgraduate education quality in public universities. Hence, promoting fairness through policy enforcement and capacity-building among supervisors will significantly improve postgraduate research management and completion rates in Rivers State universities.

The analysis in Table 4 shows a moderate but statistically significant positive relationship between supervisors' transparency and accountability and postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State, with a correlation coefficient ($r = 0.46$). This indicates that when supervisors are open, honest, and accountable in their academic

engagements, postgraduate students experience improved research progress and completion. The computed t-value of 10.15, which far exceeds the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance, confirms that this relationship is not due to chance but reflects a meaningful and statistically significant influence of supervisory transparency on students' academic performance. This finding aligns with Nwankwo and Uche (2023), who reported that transparency and accountability in postgraduate supervision foster mutual trust, clarity, and ethical conduct that enhance students' confidence and research engagement. Similarly, Ogunleye and Hassan (2022) observed that supervisors who provide timely feedback, maintain clear communication, and document research progress ethically promote academic efficiency and student satisfaction. The finding further supports Akpan and Odu (2024), who emphasized that transparent supervisory relationships reduce academic conflicts and delays, thereby facilitating successful research completion. Therefore, transparency and accountability in supervision not only strengthen academic integrity but also serve as essential drivers of postgraduate research success, motivation, and institutional productivity in public universities in Rivers State.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have clearly demonstrated that supervisors' adherence to ethical principles, particularly fairness, transparency, and accountability, has a significant and positive influence on postgraduate students' research completion rate in public universities in Rivers State. The results revealed that when supervisors uphold fairness through equitable treatment, unbiased evaluation, and objective academic guidance, postgraduate students experience higher motivation, trust, and commitment toward completing their research projects successfully. Similarly, supervisory transparency, characterized by openness, honesty, and clear communication of expectations, was found to enhance students' sense of direction, academic confidence, and engagement throughout the research process. Furthermore, accountability in supervision, manifested in responsible mentorship, timely feedback, ethical documentation, and consistency in academic support, encourages students to maintain discipline and focus on achieving their research goals. The collective influence of these ethical conduct dimensions establishes that supervisors' professional integrity is a vital determinant of postgraduate research success, academic productivity, and institutional credibility. In light of these findings, it can be concluded that promoting supervisors' adherence to fairness, transparency, and accountability is indispensable to improving the quality and timeliness of postgraduate research completion in public universities in Rivers State. Ethical supervision creates a conducive academic environment where students feel respected, supported, and motivated to achieve excellence.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made that:

1. Public universities in Rivers State should institutionalize comprehensive ethical supervision frameworks that emphasize fairness, transparency, and accountability as core standards for postgraduate supervision. University management and postgraduate schools should develop and enforce clear supervisory policies that define expected ethical behaviors, evaluation procedures, and channels for addressing supervisory misconduct.
2. Universities establish robust monitoring and feedback systems that promote accountability and transparency in postgraduate supervision. Supervisory processes should be periodically reviewed by postgraduate schools and departmental boards to ensure that supervisors adhere to ethical and professional standards in their interactions with students. A structured feedback mechanism should be introduced, allowing students to confidentially evaluate their supervisors' ethical conduct, communication efficiency, and fairness in supervision.

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