

Students' Anxiety in Speaking English: a Case Study in Online Classes

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate the students' level of anxiety in Speaking English in online classes at one university in Indonesia. The research used mix-method of quantitative and qualitative design. The quantitative data were analyzed by using The FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) by Horwitz et al., (1986) and qualitative data were analyzed by using Maxwell's theory (1996). The data were categorized, coded and contextualized. There were 42 students who participated in the research. The research found that ten students were in anxious level, 23 students were in mildly anxious level and nine students were in relaxed level. The students admitted that grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation were the students' problems in speaking. The factors caused them to have the anxiety in speaking can be categorized as communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. From the result of this research, the institution and the lecturers are expected to play major role in managing and reducing the students' anxiety. Various teaching methods and medias are hoped to make class become more interesting. Further research can be done by involving more participants and in experimental research to find out the solution to reduce the students' speaking anxiety.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, FLCAS, anxiety level, communication apprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the process of conveying ideas from one person to another through spoken language. Speaking is accomplished through the use of spoken language. Activity that involves speaking is something that is typically done in daily life. When it comes to the academic world, speaking is also critical because other people will evaluate a person based on how well they speak. Speaking ability is also considered one of the four primary skills in English class. Speaking fluently is one of the language skills that will be useful in both academic and professional settings, so mastering this skill will be beneficial. In addition, Al-Jamili et al. (2024) state that there is a great deal of information that is accessible all over the world in the English language; consequently, it is essential to be able to speak and write the language effectively at all levels. Even though all four English skills -listening, speaking, reading, and writing- are essential, speaking skills are particularly vital because they are the skills that are most frequently demonstrated in practice.

Moreover, improving speaking skills presents particular challenges. According to Al-Jamili et al. (2024), people who are not native English speakers frequently experience difficulty with English as the target language (TL). Inhibition, L1 interference, repression, lack of motivation, and lack of interest are often the causes of speaking problems. Pituxcoosuvann et al. (2024) state that attaining fluency in a foreign language is difficult, frequently due to restricted opportunities for speaking practice. As informed by Kelsen and

Liang (2024), speaking activities involve interlocutors coordinating linguistic signals to create a discourse based on interpretations, perceptions, and emotions.

After that, another critical challenge faced by the students in English speaking is speaking anxiety. Speaking in English can trigger anxiety as the student sometimes does not know what to speak, and it will affect the communication quality. It is difficult to determine whether a student is hesitant to talk in the target language due to a lack of motivation or an elevated anxiety level when assessing speaking anxiety. The general term anxiety should be defined following its symptoms to define speaking anxiety and its causes (Yalçın and İnceçay, 2013). The subjective sensation of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry that is associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system is known as anxiety. Symptoms of anxiety, such as sweating, worry, forgetfulness, and difficulties in language acquisition, are experienced by foreign language learners. It is in line with Ye et al. (2024), who also agree that speaking in front of many people in a foreign language is one of the things that people fear the most, both in the community and at the university level.

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is the discomfort felt when communicating in a foreign language, which varies depending on the medium, stage of language acquisition, and ability. After that, Pituxcoosuvann et al. (2024) also discover that some students perceived the language study experience with the system as more enjoyable and less anxiety-provoking than direct interactions with English speakers. Speaking anxiety is typically characterized as an affective factor that impacts speaking proficiency. A significant obstacle students must surmount in acquiring speaking skills is anxiety. The majority of people experience some degree of speech anxiety when they are required to address a group; in fact, public speaking is the greatest fear of many individuals. Speaking anxiety is one factor that can significantly influence students' ability to speak English, especially in the area of speaking skills. In reality, anxiety can manifest when individuals perceive a significant threat in a specific situation, such as their fear of making mistakes or their reluctance to speak English. These are the result of anxiety-related affective factors.

Despite the fact that it is frequently impossible to entirely eradicate speech anxiety, there are numerous methods to manage it and even leverage it to your advantage. Speaking anxiety can interfere with students' ability to channel and convey ideas effectively and confidently. Speaking anxiety often comes from fear of making mistakes, embarrassment about making mistakes, insufficient vocabulary, or worry about the evaluation that their lecturer will carry out. As a result, students sometimes miss the chance to share and deliver their ideas, hindering their progress in communication skills. In addition, speaking anxiety can reduce learning motivation because it causes discomfort in students and has a negative impact on overall academic performance. Students may become fearful of speaking in English in class as a result of this. Anxiety can make you less confident. Students may experience difficulties understanding and verbally communicating as a result of this anxiety. Students' fear of making mistakes is their biggest worry.

Students often experience anxiety and nervousness when performing in front of a class. Excessive anxiety can impair one's ability to function. Moreover, understanding the students' anxiety will help lecturer to improve the students' speaking skills. The lecturers can create appropriate materials and atmosphere that enable the students to ease their speaking anxiety. Developing and improving students' communication skills can sometimes cause them anxiety when speaking in front of others. It is common to experience anxiety when speaking.

The audience is unaware of the majority of the anxiety. Students sometimes experience uncontrollable body shaking, but the lecturer and other audiences may be unaware of the

situation. To overcome speaking anxiety, students must develop self-confidence (Kelsen and Liang, 2024). This step aids students in overcoming their fears while simultaneously enhancing their confidence and verbal abilities over time. According to Saed et al. (2021), technology has filled every aspect of our lives, with education being the most critical and the teaching-learning process being the primary focus. Speaking was identified as the weakest English language skill among these learners by Al-Jamili et al. (2024). In a university where students come from various backgrounds, English speaking skills are the most crucial tool for learning, acculturation, and communication. Simatupang and Supri (2024) assert that research on speaking technology has concentrated on its capacity to deliver prompt feedback, enhance pronunciation practice, and replicate authentic communication scenarios. As said by Yalçın and İnceçay (2013), the most fearsome language skill for anxious foreign language students is speaking in the target language. It is frequently reported that they experience stress and may even begin to freeze when required to deliver a speech.

Research about speaking anxiety has been done before. First Ye et al. (2024) conducted a study with 297 participants in virtual public speaking scenarios that were categorized by audience size, degree of engagement, and room dimensions. The expected anxiety levels of the participants were measured quantitatively in each of these situations. According to their research, audience size, room dimensions, and audience engagement all have a complex interaction that affects PSA. The result emphasizes how these situational factors can be successfully included in both empirical studies and therapeutic interventions. In particular, it presents a brand-new framework for regulating audience size in relation to available space. In addition, Kelsen and Liang (2024) found that speaking a foreign language can cause anxiety, which affects communication. Understanding foreign language anxiety (FLA) requires understanding the neural processes behind these interactions. EEG research indicates that anxiety is often exhibited by hemispheric frontal alpha asymmetry (FAA). They studied the neural mechanisms of FLA by collecting self-reported data on the L2AS listening and speaking sections across behavioral, cognitive, and somatic domains, and recording EEG signals during word chain turn-taking activities in Chinese and English. FAA for L2 was a significant predictor of L2AS speaking section behavioral and somatic domains in regression analysis. This research is different from previous studies because the current research was conducted in online class which the students never met the lecturers in face-to-face situation. Then, the learning process was always in online process which means the speaking process is different from learning in offline class.

Because of those reasons and backgrounds, the research aimed to investigate the speaking anxiety of online students at one University in Indonesia. The researcher answered the following questions: (a.) What are the students' speaking anxiety levels in online class? (b.) What are the possible factors that cause students' speaking anxiety in online class? Lecturers and educational institutions can consider the research findings when planning classroom activities and materials for English-speaking students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This case study employed a mixed-methods design to get the data. As stated by Fraenkel et al., (2012) and Creswell & Creswell (2018), mixed method research includes both quantitative and qualitative methods in research. This method was used since it was effective to confirm or triangulate the data in depth (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2012). This is in accordance with the objective of this research as qualitative and quantitative methods were used to find out a deep understanding about the students' level of speaking anxiety.

Regarding this, the data from quantitative study were converted into qualitative data, then the results would be interpreted and discussed.

This research was conducted in one of universities in West Sumatera. The participants were 42 students from online classes. The research site was chosen because of two reasons. First, it was accessible; therefore, it was easy to find out more information needed in this research. Second, this university provided English course in online class which was highly correlated to the aim of this study.

Moreover, this study employed purposive sampling technique as an attempt to find out meaningful information to answer the research questions. This sampling is beneficial to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings since relevant characteristics of the sample was chosen from the entire population (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Regarding this, forty-two students of online classrooms were selected because they agreed to involve in this research and they had experience to study in online English class. They enrolled in online English learning through Zoom, Google Meet, and e-learning website.

Furthermore, this research used two types of data collection techniques, including questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was developed by using the FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) questionnaire from Horwitz et al. (1986). The questionnaire was used to determine the level of the students' English-speaking anxiety which were further rated on a 5-point Likert Scale. The questionnaire consisted of 33 statements which were divided into nine positive statements and twenty-four negative statements, as stated in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Statements of FLCAS Questionnaire

Statements	Questions' Number	Number of Items
Positive	2,5,8,11,14,18,22,28,32	9
Negative	1,3,4,6,7,9,10,12,13,15,16,17,19,20,21,23,24, 25,26,27,29,30,31,33	24
Total		33

The causes of speaking anxiety were also analyzed. After that, the students' answers were calculated and analyzed by using calculation rubric from Horwitz. The positive and negative statements had different scores.

Table 2.2 Likert-Scale of FLCAS Questionnaire

Positive Statements	Description Frequency	Negative Statements
5	Strongly disagree	1
4	Disagree	2
3	Neither agree nor disagree	3
2	Agree	4
1	Strongly agree	5

Then, the students' level of anxiety can be determined after all of the answers were accumulated into numbers. The descriptions of the numbers based on FLCAS test are explained in the following table.

Table 2.3 Score of Foreign Language Anxiety Scale Adapted from Oetting's Scale (1983)

Interval Score	Level of Foreign Language Anxiety
124-165	Very Anxious
108-123	Anxious
87-107	Mildly Anxious
66-86	Relaxed
33-65	Very Relaxed

Source: (Daud et al., 2019)

In addition, interview was conducted to seven of the participants in order to find more detail information related to the students' speaking anxiety. As stated by Monday (2020), interview is an effective method to obtain people's values and beliefs in greater depth through a comprehensive speech interaction. Interviews were employed to triangulate the data obtained from the questionnaire. The data from the interview were analyzed by following the guideline from (Maxwell, 1996). The data were analysed in three stages, including writing a memo while analysing it, categorizing and coding it, and contextualizing the data to get generalization about the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data were taken from questionnaire and interview. The first to discuss is data about students' levels of anxiety.

Levels of the Students' Anxiety

Data from Questionnaire

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) test was conducted to obtain the results of this research. The following table shows the result of FLCAS test.

Table 3.1 Students' Levels of Anxiety

Interval Score	Level of Foreign Language Anxiety	Number of students
124-165	Very Anxious	0
108-123	Anxious	10
87-107	Mildly Anxious	23
66-86	Relaxed	9
33-65	Very Relaxed	0

The table displays the levels of speaking anxiety faced by the students. The result varied from relaxed to anxious. From the table above, it can be seen that no students experienced very anxious level. From 42 students, none of the students reach 124-165 score of anxiety. Therefore, ten students were found to be anxious. Their scores varied from 108 to 123; 108, 126, 122, 120, 110, 118, and 123. Then, 23 students got scores between 87-107 which indicates that they experienced mildly anxious. Nine students got scores between 66-86 which indicates that they were in relaxed level. And lastly, no student got score between 33-65 which means that none of the students were in very relaxed level of anxiety. So, from the table above, there were only three levels of anxiety faced by the students; anxious, mildly anxious and relaxed.

The students with anxious levels mostly answered agree and strongly agree on negative statements. For example, for the first statement (**I do not feel confident when speaking English**), all the ten students agreed. This reflected that those students were anxious to speak English. As stated by Botes et al. (2022), anxiety brings negative impact to foreign languages learning process. Feeling unconfident to speak foreign language, especially in online classroom, of course make the students feels shy to do speaking performance. The students with mildly anxious level mostly answered neither agree or disagree for the statement 1. The students with relaxed level disagree with the statement.

Then, another example, the data from statement 13 (**it embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class**) also show that the students had anxiety in the classroom. Nearly all the students with anxious level agreed with the statement. The anxiety stops the students to participate in the learning process. They do not want to be active in the classroom because they feel embarrassed. This is in line with Horwitz et al. (1986) that states some students believe that they should say nothing in the classroom and they should not try to figure out unfamiliar foreign language.

Additionally, for statement 31 (**I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language**), most of the students with anxious level answered agree and strongly agree. The data indicate that the students' anxiety was high so that they thought that their friends would be laugh at their mistakes. Anxiety can cause the students worry much about their speaking performance in front of others (Tiono & Sylvia, 2005). So, the feelings afraid of making mistakes and getting criticized while performing will cause the students make errors.

From the 33 statements questioned to the students, the students with anxious level mainly agreed and strongly agreed with the negative statements. It shows that the students had anxiety in themselves. Then, predominantly, those students disagreed and strongly disagreed with the positive statements. The data are contrast with the data of the students with relaxed level. This finding emphasizes that the students with anxiety and without anxiety had different ways in seeing foreign language class.

Data from Interview

To verify and validate the data from questionnaire, interview was also conducted to find out the students' speaking anxiety.

Question 1: *Apa yang anda rasakan ketika harus bicara dalam Bahasa Inggris?*

How do you feel when you have to speak in English?

Table 3.2 Students' answers of interview question 1

Student 1	<i>Gugup apabila bicara dalam Bahasa Inggris secara spontan dan tanpa persiapan.</i>
	I feel nervous to speak in English spontaneously and without any preparation
Student 2	<i>Merasa gugup dan kurang percaya diri karena kurangnya persiapan atau bahan yang akan disampaikan.</i>
	I feel nervous and less confident because I have a lack of preparation and material to discuss or talk about.

Student 3	<i>Gugup, karena saya tahu kemampuan bahasa Inggris saya sangat kurang.</i>
	Nervous, because I know that I have a lack of English ability.

From the data above, it can be seen that the students realized that they had a lack of ability in speaking English. It made them get nervous and unconfident to communicate in English. The students needed preparation before speaking. As stated by Horwitz et al. (1986), a study shows that the students feel more relaxed when they participate in a drill or give prepared speech compared to a role-play situation. This confirms the data that the students got anxiety if they had to do unscripted speaking. The data also support the information from questionnaire. Most of the students admitted that they felt nervous to speak in English.

Question 2: *Apakah anda cemas dan gugup ketika harus bicara dalam Bahasa Inggris di depan kelas ataupun di depan orang banyak?*

Do you feel anxious and nervous when you have to speak in English in front of your friends or many people?

Table 3.3 Students' answers of interview question 2

Student 1	<i>Tergantung situasi, apabila bicara dalam Bahasa Inggris tetapi sudah dipersiapkan dari jauh-jauh hari saya merasa enjoy. Akan tetapi apabila bicara dalam bahasa Inggris secara spontan saya merasa cemas dan gugup.</i>
	It depends on the situation, if I talk in English and I already prepare it well before, I will enjoy it. However, if I talk in English spontaneously, I will feel anxious and nervous.
Student 2	<i>Iya</i> Yes
Student 3	<i>Iya</i> Yes

The data reveal that the students felt anxious and nervous to speak English in front of their classmates. It can happen because the students were afraid of making mistakes and thought people would laugh at their mistakes. As informed by Ismail et al. (2022), anxiety causes mental block which prevents students to perform well in the classroom. They worry about people's assessment on them and they are afraid that people will laugh at their mistakes. It prohibits them to participate and volunteer in the classroom discussion.

Question 3: *Apa kesulitan anda dalam berbicara Bahasa Inggris di kelas ataupun di depan banyak orang?*

What are your difficulties in speaking English in front of your friends and many people?

Table 3.4 Students' answers of interview question 3

Student 1	<i>Kesulitan dalam menyusun kalimat dalam bahasa Inggris karena belum memahami grammar dengan baik</i>
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	It is difficult to form sentences in English because I do not understand the grammar well.
Student 2	<i>kesulitan dalam merangkai kata menjadi kalimat yang efektif dalam bahasa inggris.</i> It is difficult to form effective sentences in English.
Student 3	<i>Pronunciation nya yg kurang tepat dalam pengucapan bahasa inggris,dan juga banyak kata yang belum saya ketahui artinya,dan juga lawan bicara yang tidak ada,karena kebanyakan siswa tidak bisa berbahasa Inggris</i> Incorrect pronunciation and also unknown vocabulary, and there is no partner to practice speaking because many students cannot speak English.

Based on the information above, it can be said that grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation were the students' problems in speaking English. The difficulties in those components caused them to feel unconfident to speak English. They got nervous and anxious to produce utterance in English. The data are in line with the statement of Daud et al., (2019) that the students are not confident with their English ability. The good speaker has good linguistic competence. So, if the students cannot arrange good and correct sentences, they would become more afraid of making mistakes in front of their friends.

The possible factors that cause students' speaking anxiety in online class

Data from interview also show that the students reveal the factors caused them to have anxiety in speaking.

Question 4: *Apa penyebab anda merasa cemas tersebut?*

What were the causes of your anxiety?

Table 3.5 Students' answers of interview question 4

Student 1	<i>Belum menguasai grammar dengan baik dan belum mampu membuat kalimat dalam bahasa Inggris dengan benar.</i> I do not master and understand grammar and cannot form correct sentences in English.
Student 2	<i>Karena kurangnya vocabulary dan grammar, sehingga ketika diajak bicara secara mendadak kurang percaya diri untuk menjawab dengan bahasa Inggris.</i> I lack in vocabulary and grammar so when people speak to me in English spontaneously, I am not confident to answer in English.
Student 3	<i>Karena Pronunciation saya kurang tepat,dan juga banyak arti kata yang saya tidak tahu.</i> Because my pronunciation is not right and I have little knowledge in vocabulary.
Student 4	<i>Biasanya yang membuat saya cemas adalah pikiran saya bahwa ketika berhadapan orang lain saya akan membuat kesalahan, pikiran saya yang berlebihan membuat saya berada dalam posisi yang cemas</i>

	Usually, what makes me anxious is my thoughts that when dealing with other people, I will make a mistake, my excessive thoughts put me in an anxious position.
Student 5	<i>Kurang percaya diri terhadap diri sendiri dan takut di cemoohan</i>
	Lack of self-confidence and fear of being mocked
Student 6	<i>Saya cemas disebabkan nanti mendapatkan respon yang buruk dari orang lain</i>
	I'm anxious because I might get a bad response from others later.
Student 7	<i>takut salah dalam pengucapan kata didepan orang banyak</i>
	I am afraid of mispronouncing words in front of many people

The data above confirm the data from questionnaire that unveil the students' anxiety. Some possible factors were found as the causes of students' speaking anxiety. Grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and self-confidence influence the students' anxiety. The data clearly reveal that the students were not confident to communicate by using English. It can be said that fear of making mistakes and getting mocked or criticized by others cause the students to have anxiety in speaking. Based on the data above, Horwitz et al., (1986) explain that the factors that caused students to have anxiety can be classified into three factors below:

1) Communication apprehension

The students admitted that they have a lack of knowledge in English so they are not confident to speak in English. This is in line with Kralova & Petrova (2017) that explain that communication apprehension is the feeling of fear to communicate with people. It can be being afraid to talk and convey message or to receive the oral message from others. The students might have a big concern for speaking with a good or native-like pronunciation. The fear and nervousness can be the sources of anxiety. The students avoid talking and responding spontaneously in English. Additionally, they think that they will make mistakes in speaking so they decide to avoid speaking English. The students admitted that they were afraid of mispronouncing the words in front of other people. They cannot form the correct English sentences.

2) Test anxiety

The students acknowledged that they were anxious if they failed at using right English and making mistakes. They informed that they lacked in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation knowledge so it made them become more anxious and afraid to speak English. As stated by Kralova & Petrova (2017), test anxiety can happen when the students cannot perform as perfect as they want themselves to be. They perceive every correction as failure (Horwitz et al., 1986)

3) Fear of negative evaluation

The students were afraid of getting mocked by other students when talking in English. The fear of being criticized can appear because the students realized that they had problems in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. This confirms the theory of Horwitz et al. (1986) that state the students worry that their friends have better performances than them. Then, they also think that their friends will negatively appraise them. This speculation can

produce mental block that leads the students to fail perform their best at class (Ismail et al., 2022). The students were afraid to talk because they afraid to get bad response from their friends. They did not want to participate and volunteer to answer in the classroom.

Question 5: *Apa yang sudah anda lakukan untuk mengatasi rasa cemas tersebut?*
What did you do to overcome your anxiety?

Table 3.6 Students' answers of interview question 5

Student 1	<i>Belajar tentang penggunaan grammar dan mempersiapkan diri sebelum berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris.</i> Study about grammar and prepare myself before speaking in English.
Student 2	<i>Menyiapkan bahan materi atau informasi yang akan disampaikan dengan memperbanyak vocabulary dan cara pengucapannya.</i> Prepare material or information for speaking by learning vocabulary and its pronunciation.
Student 3	<i>Belajar di internet bagaimana bahasa inggris yang benar.</i> Learning from internet about the correct ways to speak English
Student 4	<i>biasanya saya memegang dan menekan pena, atau pun dengan menarik nafas, atau mengamati hal hal yang membuat saya mengerti lagi diposisi seperti apa dalam lingkungan tersebut</i> Usually, I hold and press pen, or take a deep breath, or observe things that help me understand my situation at that time in that environment.
Student 5	<i>Meyakinkan diri sendiri</i> Believe in myself
Student 6	<i>Mencoba melatih berbicara dengan bahasa inggris dengan teman, adik dan keluarga</i> Try to practice speaking English with friends, younger siblings and family
Student 7	<i>memperbanyak belajar tentang kosa kata</i> Learn a lot about vocabulary

The data indicate that preparation, relaxation and positive thinking were the ways the students used to solve their anxiety. The students admitted that they learned and practiced before speaking English. Ölmezer-öztürk & Öztürk (2021) explain that the teacher can integrate speaking activities in classroom so the students can have chance to practice. Another student also revealed that holding something while speaking can reduce their anxiety in speaking. This is in line with Ölmezer-öztürk & Öztürk (2021) that argue that feelings relaxed can help the students gain confidence. The students will have positive thought and enjoy the speaking process.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This current research aimed to find out the level of students' speaking anxiety and the possible factors caused the speaking anxiety. The results of the study revealed that ten students experienced anxious level, 23 students got mildly anxious level and nine students felt relaxed. No students were in very anxious and very relaxed level. The factors that caused students to have speaking anxiety were communication apprehension, test anxiety

and fear of negative evaluation. The students admitted that they got problems in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and self confidence in speaking. The data were collected by using FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) questionnaire developed by Horwitz (1986) and also interview. There were 33 questions in the questionnaire. The participants were 42 students from online classes.

Based on the research results, there are three components of suggestions that can be considered to overcome students' speaking anxiety, namely suggestions for educational institutions, lecturers and further research. First, universities can organize anxiety management training, for example workshops on relaxation techniques, breathing, or positive self-talk. Then, institutions can also provide adequate technological facilities, including online platforms that support interactions such as breakout rooms, chat boxes, and reaction buttons. Second, lecturers can use various teaching methods such as role-play and pair work to make classes more interactive. Then, lecturers can also provide positive support, such as praise for students' efforts, not just assessing the final results. Finally, further research can involve participants from various for more generalizable results. Further research can also compare learning models (online, offline, hybrid) in relation to speaking anxiety. Then, research by conducting experimental research to see the effectiveness of interventions in reducing speaking anxiety can also be carried out.

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