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## Decoding the core of words: Enhancing vocabulary through listening practice using the ‘Listen a Minute’ website.

Salsa Nabila<sup>1</sup>, Aries Fachriza<sup>2\*</sup>, Dinar Dipta<sup>3</sup>, Diska Fatima Virgiyanti<sup>4</sup>

Universitas Darussalam Gontor/ Department of English Language Teaching, Jl Raya Siman Ponorogo, Indonesia  
e-mail: [Salsanbla54@gmail.com](mailto:Salsanbla54@gmail.com), \*[aries.fachriza@unida.gontor.ac.id](mailto:aries.fachriza@unida.gontor.ac.id), [dinardipta@unida.gontor.ac.id](mailto:dinardipta@unida.gontor.ac.id),  
[diska.fatima@unida.gontor.id](mailto:diska.fatima@unida.gontor.id)

\*corresponding author

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### ABSTRACT

Vocabulary recognition plays a crucial role in identifying key information of spoken text in listening comprehension. This study aligns with Brown’s theory, which posits that listening involves bottom-up processing that requires learners to recognize and interpret sounds, words, and grammatical structures. This study aimed to examine how effectively the *Listen A Minute* website helped tenth-grade students of Secondary Level at Senior High School in Central Java recognize key words through listening exercises. A quasi-experimental approach with an experimental and control group was employed. The sample consisted of 60 tenth-grade students of Secondary Level at Senior High School in Central Java. The experiment used a material from the Listen A Minute website, while the control group received the conventional listening. Data were collected from pre- and post-test listening assessments, which were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Mann–Whitney U test. Results revealed a significant difference between the two groups, with a p-value of 0.003 ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings reject the null hypothesis and support the alternative hypothesis. The findings indicated that students’ ability to identify keywords during listening tasks significantly improved when using the Listen A Minute website. Therefore, the website can be considered an effective pedagogical tool for improving listening comprehension, particularly in identifying key information in spoken texts.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For foreign language learners, listening is crucial as it serves as the foundation for developing other language skills. It enables students to organize and reflect on information as they create meaning from what they hear. Brown stresses that listening is a complex cognitive activity, involving not just hearing sounds but also interpreting them to understand meaning. (Brown, 2015). Additionally, listening well requires students to engage with spoken language by connecting it to their prior knowledge (Yuniar et al., 2024). Therefore, listening plays an important role in helping learners comprehend spoken English effectively. Moreover, listening comprehension involves top-down and bottom-up processing. As learners decode linguistic elements, or sounds, words, and so on, when decoding text (Hasonni & Azzawi, 2024; Mahdavy, 2023; Meng et al., 2023). Students use their contextual and background knowledge to comprehend the meaning. As a result, listening is key to helping learners understand spoken English well.

There are several micro-skills within listening comprehension that must be mastered for successful understanding. This presents a number of listening micro-skills, e.g., discriminating among grammatical structures; identifying key words; perceiving the functional meaning of

utterances (Jassim & Bloushi, 2024). Of these, the ability to identify key lexical items may be most critical. In contrast, this study describes this ability as core word recognition and involves identifying salient words that encapsulate the abstract meaning of spoken input. When taught core words or high-frequency, functional words, these can be semantic anchors for learners to use in efficiently creating meaning. Previous studies demonstrate that focusing on word processing helps learners filter relevant information (Butar Butar & Katemba, 2023). Hence, identifying core words is one of the micro-skills essential for listening comprehension.

The importance of recognizing key words, which allows learners to identify important lexical items in spoken discourse. Fadila explains that learners must identify the core word to activate, enabling them to focus on only the most important details (Latupono & Nikijuluw, 2022). It was also important to include keywords when understanding spoken input and identifying the main idea (Reynolds & Xie, 2022). Thus, this ability is vital for students as they try to manipulate and comprehend verbal expression.

Many students still struggle with listening comprehension, especially with identifying the core of words. Many students have difficulty understanding spoken texts, particularly in identifying word roots. Most problems stem from insufficient vocabulary and a lack of variety in listening materials (Wahidah et al., 2023). Similarly, listening is a complex process requiring cognitive and psychomotor activity, making it difficult for learners to process spoken input properly (Yonantha, 2020). As a result, learners often have difficulty understanding spoken texts, especially when they encounter rapid speech and unfamiliar words.

To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to apply proper learning media. Digital media offers easy-to-understand, well-structured learning materials that can supplement listening instruction (Indriani et al., 2024). Moreover, technology-based learning platforms can greatly increase the students' engagement and motivation. To this end, the Listen A Minute website offers short and well-structured listening texts that allow students to focus on important details and improve their listening comprehension skills (Wijaya et al., 2023). Previous studies have shown that well-organized listening practice can result in significant growth in students' listening skills. Familiarizing the learner with listening materials via repetition helps in identifying words better (Jose, 2023). In addition, short, well-structured listening texts may improve learners' ability to process spoken language at the word-recognition level (Graham & Santos, 2015). Nevertheless, much of the existing research has focused on general listening comprehension rather than specifically targeting word recognition particularly on whether exposure to different types of digital media can improve language learning. However, much less attention has been given to how learners process spoken language at a more detailed level, such as recognizing individual words within continuous speech, especially when factors like age and social background are considered. In fact, the ability to identify the constituent parts of words has not received much empirical attention, even though it is such an important part of making sense. In addition, the concept of word-level recognition, that is, the ability to identify individual words in spoken input, has not been clearly defined or thoroughly examined in existing research. Even though this skill plays a crucial role in understanding spoken language, it is often overlooked or addressed only indirectly.

Furthermore, there is still limited research exploring how structured digital listening platforms can specifically support the development of this skill among secondary school students. Most studies tend to focus on learners in higher education, leaving uncertainty about whether similar benefits apply in other contexts, such as the use of platforms like Listen A Minute. Therefore, further research is needed to understand better how word-level recognition can be

developed and how digital listening tools can effectively support this skill among younger learners outside higher education settings.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate students' listening comprehension, particularly in recognizing the core of words, using *Listen A Minute website* as a learning medium. This study employs a quasi-experimental design involving tenth-grade students to examine their improvement after the treatment. Therefore, this research is expected to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of digital listening media in improving students' ability to recognize key vocabulary in spoken English.

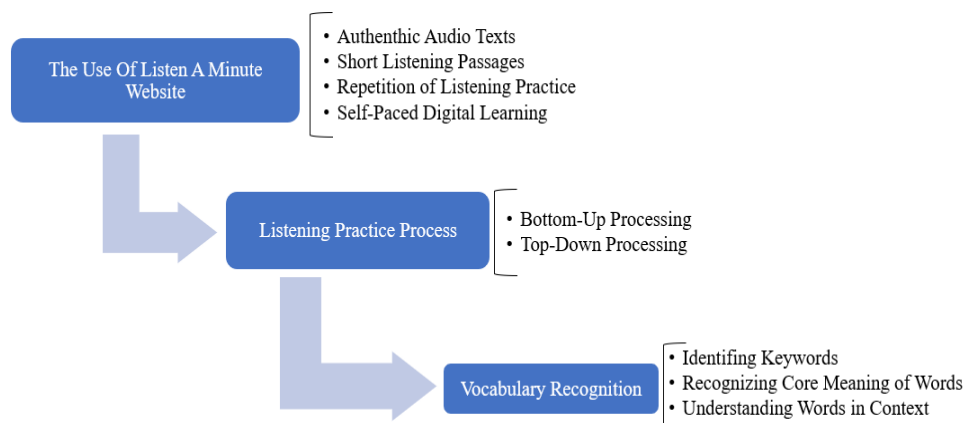
This research provides meaningful theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it extends the field of listening comprehension research by highlighting the important role of micro-skills, in particular core word recognition, in language acquisition. In practice, the results are expected to provide teachers with meaningful guidance on selecting appropriate digital media to develop students' listening abilities, especially in helping learners note important vocabulary in spoken English. Besides, this study could serve as a basis for future studies focusing on specialized listening strategies in foreign language teaching.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research examines the interplay among digital listening media, listening processes, and vocabulary perception in relation to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Listen A Minute website, a teaching and learning resource that combines real audio input with short listening passages on thousands of topics to provide repetition and self-paced digital practice at the level of students' "micro-skills," as small components of what good listeners do.

**Figure 1.** The procedure of listening activities

According to the figure, there are some explanations. First, Authentic audio texts play a



critical role in giving learners access to the subtleties of authentic language use, such as correct pronunciation, intonation, and discourse. Such materials introduce learners to the real-life of communication, and help in developing communicative competence (Azmin, 2022; Gilmore, 2007). For this reason, *Listen A Minute website* provides short monologues featuring real spoken English for students to single out vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Second, short listening passages support comprehension by reducing cognitive load and allowing learners to focus on essential information (Oktavani & Meirafoni, 2025). Well-structured and concise listening inputs help students process spoken language more efficiently and facilitate the development of listening strategies, such as identifying main ideas and keywords (Al-harbi & Mirza, 2024; Ali et al., 2024;

Oktavani & Meirafoni, 2025). Empirical studies have shown that shorter audio texts significantly improve learners' listening performance and confidence. Third, the repetition of listening practice enhances learners' ability to recognize key vocabulary and understand spoken messages. Repeated exposure to the same audio helps learners become familiar with phonological features, distinguish similar sounds, and identify important information more accurately. This process strengthens word recognition and supports the development of listening comprehension over time. Fourth, self-paced digital learning, grounded in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), provides learners with autonomy and flexibility to control their learning process (Nuzuludin et al., 2025). Through digital platforms, students can replay audio, select materials, and regulate their learning pace, which promotes engagement, motivation, and independent learning.

In terms of listening processes, this study also adopts both bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing enables learners to decode sounds, words, and linguistic units to construct meaning, while top-down processing allows them to use prior knowledge and contextual cues to interpret spoken input (Fachriza et al., 2025; Karimi & Chalak, 2022). The integration of these processes is essential for effective listening comprehension. Therefore, this study adds both processes to support students in effectively recognizing individual words while constructing overall meaning from spoken input. Moreover, this study emphasizes listening micro-skills, particularly identifying keywords and recognizing the core of words. Keyword identification assists the learners to focus on essential lexical items that carry meaning, while core word recognition enables them to extract the fundamental meaning of spoken input even in fast or reduced speech (Moussaoui & Belhaj, 2025; Qizi, 2023). These skills are closely related to vocabulary recognition and contextual understanding, enabling learners to interpret meaning in real communicative situations.

Despite the growing integration of digital media in EFL listening instruction, existing studies have largely underlined general comprehension outcomes, with limited attention to learners' ability to decode the core elements of words as a foundational micro-level listening skill. This gap is particularly critical, as failure to accurately recognize individual words may hinder higher-level meaning construction, even when learners are exposed to abundant listening input. Furthermore, the pedagogical value of structured platforms such as *Listen A Minute* remains underexplored in comparison to more commonly used, less structured audio sources such as YouTube. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to critically examine whether targeted digital input can more effectively support learners' bottom-up processing. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: *Do tenth-grade students at the secondary level achieve a better understanding of the core of words through the use of the Listen A Minute website?* By focusing on this question, the study aims to contribute more nuanced insights into the role of structured listening resources in strengthening fundamental listening processes in EFL contexts.

### 3. METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design using listening test as a technique of collecting data between experiment and control group. This design aimed to assess the effectiveness of the treatment by comparing students' between two groups (Anantasia, 2025). In this study, the aim was to investigate students' ability to recognize individual words in spoken input as a key micro-level listening skill, using the *Listen A Minute* website for the experimental group and YouTube audio for the control group. Both groups were given pre- and post-tests to measure changes in their listening performance. This study involved 60 tenth-grade students from

a senior high school, who were assigned to experimental and control groups based on their existing class structure. The research was carried out in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom setting. Data were collected by conducting pretest and posttest that designed to assess students' ability to recognize individual words in spoken input.

The instrument used in this study was a multiple-choice listening test comprising 20 items, designed to assess word-level recognition and aligned with the learning objectives and listening materials. For the listening activities, we adapted the listening materials from *Listen A Minute website* that provides short and well-organized audio text for language learners (Ningsih et al., 2022). To ensure the instrument's validity, content validity was established by developing test items based on relevant listening indicators, particularly vocabulary recognition and understanding of spoken texts. The items were also aligned with the theoretical framework of bottom-up processing and word recognition skills, ensuring that the instrument accurately measured the intended construct. Furthermore, the instrument's validity was statistically tested using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation in SPSS. The results showed that all 20 items were valid, as each item's  $r$ -value exceeded the  $r$ -table value (0.396), indicating a significant correlation between each item and the overall test score. In addition, the instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient above the acceptable threshold, indicating that it was consistent and reliable in measuring students' listening performance. A pre-test was given to assess students' listening ability, particularly their recognition of critical vocabulary, before treatment began. Afterward, the treatment section of the article used listening materials from Listen A Minute, presented over several sessions (Gile, 2023). During this phase, students practiced listening three times and performed activities in a controlled manner while focusing on identifying keywords as they listened to the texts. At the end of the treatment, a post-test was administered to measure how far the students' listening skills had improved. The data collected from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed quantitatively. The students' scores were carefully calculated and assessed to measure how much they improved. The focus of the analysis was to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference between student pre- and post-intervention performance. This assessment yielded considerable evidence supporting the effectiveness of the Listen A Minute media in enhancing students' listening comprehension skills, particularly their ability to grasp word meanings.

To examine differences in students' listening performance between the two different groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed. This nonparametric test was chosen because the data violated the assumption of normality and the analysis involved comparisons between two independent groups (experimental and control groups). The comparison was conducted on the post-test scores of both groups to determine whether there was a significant difference in listening performance after the treatment. A  $p$ -value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were derived from the analysis of students' listening performance, including pre-test and post-test scores, within a quasi-experimental framework on experimental and control groups. The results showed that *Listen A Minute*, as a learning medium, had a positive and significant effect on improving students' listening performance. The pre-test results showed that students' initial ability in recognizing key vocabulary from spoken texts was relatively low, with a mean score of (M = 69.67) (SD = 14.320). Many students had difficulty identifying words in continuous speech, resulting in limited comprehension of the listening materials. These difficulties included difficulty distinguishing similar sounds, recognizing familiar words in different phonological forms, and processing spoken input in real time. The specific data revealed by descriptive statistic on Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistic

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest Control	30	30	95	65.00	16.115
Pretest Experiment	30	30	85	69.67	14.320
Posttest Control	30	45	100	76.67	14.641
Posttest Experiment	30	45	95	86.09	10.605
Valid N (listwise)	30				

According to table 1, the experimental group had a relatively low mean score (M = 69.67, SD = 14.320) before treatment. It was indicating that students had challenge on recognizing individual words in spoken texts. Many students struggled to process continuous speech, accurately identify words, and distinguish similar sounds or different phonological forms in real-time listening. After the treatment, the post-test mean score of the experimental group raised to 86,09 on mean scores. In addition, students shows improvement on their ability to recognize words in spoken input after being exposed to the learning media. Prior to conducting the inferential analysis, prerequisite tests were carried out to examine the data distribution. A normality test was performed, and the results showed that both pre-test and post-test scores had significance values below 0.05, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, a non-parametric statistical test was applied. The Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare the post-test scores between the experimental and control groups, as the analysis involved two independent groups and the data did not meet the assumption of normality. It can be explained on table 2 on normality test.

**Table 2.** Test of Normality

Score	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Total Posttest Experiment	0.190	30	0.007	0.937	30	0.076
posttest control	0.240	32	0.000	0.757	32	0.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The normality test results on table 2 indicated that the posttest scores of the experimental group were normally distributed based on the Shapiro–Wilk test ( $p = 0.076 > 0.05$ ), while the control group data were not normally distributed ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Therefore, since the assumption of normality was not fully met, a nonparametric test (Mann–Whitney U test) was employed for further analysis. Moreover, a homogeneity test was conducted to determine whether the variances of the data were equal. The results revealed a value indicating significance, also less than 0.05, which means that the data sets were not homogeneous. The evidence can be shown on homogeneity test in table 3

**Table 3.** Test of Homogeneity

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Total	Based on Mean	2.715	3	120	0.048
	Based on Median	2.350	3	120	0.076
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.350	3	116.259	0.076
	Based on the trimmed mean	2.751	3	120	0.046

According to the data, the results of Levene’s test based on the mean indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated ( $p = 0.048 < 0.05$ ). Although the median-based results suggested homogeneity, the primary criterion (based on mean) was used for interpretation. Therefore, the data did not fully meet the assumption of equal variances; consequently, a nonparametric test (Mann–Whitney U test) was employed for further analysis on table 4.

**Table 4.** Test Statistics

	Total
Mann-Whitney U	264.000
Wilcoxon W	729.000
Z	-3.081
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002

a. Grouping Variable: Score

According to the statistical result, The score of the Mann–Whitney U test, it revealed a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups ( $U = 264.000$ ,  $Z = -3.081$ ,  $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ ), indicating that students’ listening performance differed significantly between the two groups. The experimental group achieved a higher mean score ( $M = 86.09$ ) than the control group ( $M = 76.67$ ), suggesting that the treatment had a positive effect on students’ listening performance. It was suggesting that the use of the *Listen A Minute website* was more effective than YouTube audio in attaining students’ listening performance on core of word.

The results a considerable difference in students' ability to recognize individual words in spoken input after the treatment. However, this improvement should be interpreted with caution, as it may not be solely attributed to the treatment. Other factors, such as practice effects or group differences, may also have influenced the results. These findings still support the view that listening is an active cognitive process, in which learners not only decode auditory input but also construct meaning simultaneously (Fachriza et al., 2022; Goh & Vandergrift, 2021; Richards, 2008). This discrepancy may be due to the use of repetition in listening exercises, which enabled students to listen to even this elementary vocabulary a few times; they gradually improved at recognizing these words. This is consistent with previous literature that has demonstrated the advantages of repeated listening for increasing the skill to pick out important content information and reinforcing overall comprehension of what one hears (Marzona, 2025; Rmelah & Pornwiriyakit, 2023). Thus, it is clear that applying repeated listening practice to activities for students should be one of the most indispensable ways to promote students' ability to identify central vocabulary, which also leads to more efficient listening comprehension.

Furthermore, the use of short listening passages considerably contributed to learners' results by reducing their cognitive load and helping them focus on important aspects of language. Research has shown that well-structured auditory inputs lead to improved comprehension and vocabulary processing (Al-harbi & Mirza, 2024; Putri, 2026). Theoretically, these results highlight the significance of bottom-up processing in which learners infer meaning by decoding sounds, words, and linguistic units from auditory input. (Fachriza et al., 2026). It is a vital process that assists learners in recognizing salient lexical units within speech, which flows continuously (Field, 2008; Richards, 2008). Thus, it can be concluded that implementing short, structured listening materials, along with bottom-up processing, is effective in improving learners' ability to decipher verbal input and recognize prominent lexical items in oral texts.

In addition, students demonstrated significant gains in using keyword identification strategies, allowing them to focus more on what matters within the context to enhance comprehension accuracy. Identifying keywords is one of the most essential techniques for an effective way to mentally digest spoken discourse (Muslim & Sulistyanningrum, 2024; Yunus & Salmiah, 2025). The use of authentic audio materials, which expose students to natural-language environments, including pronunciation and intonation (Muñoz, 2018), and real patterns of discourse, further proved beneficial in increasing effectiveness. Such exposure is vital to develop communicative competence in listening skills (Gilmore, 2007; Tomlinson, 2012). In addition, personalized instruction through self-paced digital learning enabled students to control their own learning paths while allowing repeated access and practice. It is in line with Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), which encourages learners' autonomy and assists language learning (Dong et al., 2022; Noori, 2025). In an overall sense, employing main ideas strategies with genuine auditory content through a digital medium that can be accessed independently allows students to focus better on what they are listening to in a more natural setting at their own pace. These findings in line with Graham and Santos's findings, who drew attention to the fact that short, well-structured listening material can enhance bottom-up processing, especially word recognition (Saito et al., 2024). Limiting the audio duration allows them to stay focused and attentive during listening. Hence, they can better identify the most important parts of words. This highlights the importance of selecting listening materials that match students' proficiency levels and cognitive capacities, particularly for senior high school students. Moreover, the well-spaced exposure to listening material helps students retain vocabulary and proved that structured repetition of the listening material allows students to recognize and remember key words (Tetiana

Zubenko, 2022). This can be explained by the features of the Listen A Minute website, such as short materials with a balanced topic, followed by some quick exercises, which make it clear to students (Nurohmawati et al., 2023). Such features actively engage learners and promote more profound cognitive processing of spoken content. On the other hand, YouTube audio is often longer than archetypal materials, and the background sound dilutes their effect.

However, despite the statistically significant improvement, some students still encountered difficulties in recognizing unfamiliar vocabulary and reduced forms. It implies that listening comprehension is a multidimensional process that requires continued exposure and practice. By and large, the results confirmed that using Listen A Minute, repetition, short listening passages, contextually authentic materials, and self-paced technology-based learning markedly improved students' awareness of the gist of words in a setting. In conclusion, it has been shown that the inclusion of structured digital listening media, specifically Listen A Minute, into a course significantly improves students' listening micro-skills, especially their knowledge of core component recognition within words. Their approach, which includes repeated exposure and manageable listening inputs of 1-minute audio clips with conceptually relevant vocabulary from authentic materials, gets learners to process spoken language more efficiently through bottom-up processing mechanisms. Replicating on-screen autonomy has also been shown to increase self-paced digital learning environments, sustaining learner engagement over time. On the other hand, recognition of unfamiliar vocabulary and reduced forms remains problematic, while listening comprehension is inherently difficult. As a result, deliberate listening practice is critical. In general, the study reiterates the importance of embedding pedagogically relevant, well-structured materials with technology-enhanced learning to optimize listening in EFL contexts.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the use of the Listen A Minute website as a digital learning tool to support students' listening comprehension, particularly in recognizing individual words in spoken input. The results showed that students in the experimental group demonstrated a better understanding of the core elements of words in their listening performance after the treatment than those in the control group. These findings indicate that although the use of structured digital listening materials may support the development of listening micro-skills, the results do not conclusively demonstrate that the treatment was more effective than the conventional method. Other factors, such as initial group differences, practice effects, or external exposure to English outside the classroom may have also influenced the observed differences. The findings are partially consistent with theories of listening as an active cognitive process, particularly regarding bottom-up processing and repeated exposure. The use of short, structured listening materials and repeated practice may help learners focus on key lexical items and improve word recognition. However, the results of this study suggest that these benefits should be interpreted with caution and not viewed as the sole cause of students' improvement. This study also highlights several limitations. First, the use of a quasi-experimental design without random assignment may have influenced group comparability. Second, the measurement of listening micro-skills was limited to a multiple-choice test, which may not fully capture students' actual word recognition ability. Future research is therefore recommended to employ a true experimental design, use more precise instruments to measure listening micro-skills, and control for external factors that may affect learning outcomes. Overall, this study suggests that digital listening platforms such as *Listen A Minute* can support listening development. However, their effectiveness may depend on various contextual and methodological factors.

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