

Arabic Scholarship: A Fulcrum of Development in Africa: A Case Study of Private Arabic Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

There is no doubt that Arabic studies has a long history in Nigeria, therefore there are many private Arabic institutions where Arabic language is the core subject and medium of expression. However Arabic scholarship has little relevance in government establishments because the graduates of the institutions in most cases are denied gainful employment because of their poor background in English language which is the official language of the country. The challenging wave of the situation prompts few educated Muslims to agitate for the place of Arabic Studies in education sector and its relevance in the contemporary Nigerian society. This is possible only if English Language and other secular subjects are introduced into curricula of private Arabic tertiary institutions. Consequently, only few Arabic Institutes that are able to do this were upgraded by the National Council for Colleges of Education to the status of National Certificate in Education (N.C.E.) and licensed to award National Certificate in Education (N.C.E) in Arabic studies. This paper focuses on few private Arabic tertiary institutions that were upgraded to the status of N.C.E. by the National Council for Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The paper provides information on the background of Arabic studies in Nigeria; it traces it back to the eleventh century in Kanem Borno. It further discusses and examines some of the programmes run by the few upgraded Colleges of Education one after the others; in addition it identifies some of the challenges that are facing these private Arabic institutions and proffers ways to tackle the challenges. The paper is rounded up with conclusion while recommendations are made.

Introduction

The root of the present private Arabic Institutions in Nigeria dates back to the 11th Century in Kanem–Borno, where numerous private Arabic institutes were established by the individuals, rulers and Muslim communities. The first known Arabic scholar who established private Arabic institutes was Muhammad ibn Mani.¹ The early Arabic institute in Kanem–Bornu, produced reputable Arabic scholar of remarkable standing, Shaykh Ibrahim b. Ya ‘qub al- Dhakwani al- Kanem (d. 1211 C.E.), who appeared in the intellectual scene of Marakush in the 13th century.²

The early private Arabic institutes in Kanem–Borno were followed by similar ones in the 11th and 14th centuries of Kano Hausa state with the aid of Arabic scholars and Muslim traders who traversed the major trans-saharan trade routes that connected the Central Sudan and Western Sudan.³ Both Kanem –Borno and Kano Hausa state remained the major intellectual centres of Arabic studies throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, before they were competed by Katsina which became intellectual centre and seat of celebrated scholars in the sixteenth century.⁴ The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed establishment of several private Arabic institutes. Many prominent scholars emerged and established Arabic institutes. Among the products and founders of Arabic institutes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were Muhammad al-Kashnawi known as Dan Marina or Ibn al-Sabbagh (d. 1665C.E.), Muhammad dan Masani (d. 1667 C.E) and Abdullah b. Muhammad b. Salim known as ‘Abdullah Suka. Other Arabic scholars who established Arabic institutes and flourished in the intellectual scene were Muhammad al-Wali b. Sulaiman al-Fullati (d. 1689 C.E), Al-Tahir b. Ibrahim b. Harun (d. 1776 C.E.), Muhammad Mudi b. Muhammad Mudi al-Dutawi Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Fullani al-Kashinawi (d. 1741 C.E.) and Jubril b. Umar and al-Qumati (d. 1773 C.E). These personages were scholars of Arabic studies, founders and proprietors of private Arabic institutes and authors of many reputable Arabic works. The nineteenth century jihad of Uthman b. Fudi and the establishment of Sokoto caliphate contributed to the establishment of private Arabic institutes. The jihad leaders and generation of Arabic scholars after then established private Arabic institutes. Among the most prominent private Arabic institutions were those of Sokoto, Gwandu, Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Bauchi, Borno, Adamawa, Bidda, Ilorin and Ibadan etc.⁵ The existence of numerous and various Arabic educational institutions in various parts of Nigeria in the period is an evidence of the widespread of Arabic studies in Nigeria.

The beginning of the second quarter of the 19th century saw the rise of many private Arabic institutes in Yorubaland. Ilorin and Ibadan had major private institutes of Arabic studies. Prominent proprietors and founders of private Arabic institutes include Muhammad Mahmud b. Shitta b. Salih (d. 1891 C.E.) Muhammad b.Ahmad Begore (d. 1913 C.E), Busari b. Badr. Al-Din (d. 1915 C.E.), Muhammad Jum‘a Alabi fondly called Taju al-Adab (d. 1923). Also on record were Ahmad b. Abu Bakr al-Qasim Alaga (d. 1888C.E.) Muhammad Sanusi b. Harun (d. 1938C.E), Ahmad b. Rufai b. Muhammad Bello (d. 1971C.E) and Haruna matanmi (d. 19, 1995:1).³⁵ C.E) ,Adam Abdullah al illuri (d.1992) and Shaykh Kamaldeen al Adabi (d.2005).⁶

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF PRIVATE ARABIC INSTITUTIONS

The concept of private Arabic institutions simply means the body of knowledge or subjects taught in non – governmental institutions owned by individual Muslims and Societies, through the vehicle of Arabic language. Examples of the Institutions are Markas at Agege Lagos, established by Shaykh Adam al-illuri (d.1992), institute of Arabic College isolo Lagos, established by Ansar ud- Deen Society of Nigeria and Institute of Arabic College Elekuro, Ibadan, established by Shaykh Muritadha. Thus Arabic language serves as medium of expression in the institutions. There are many such private Arabic institutions in Nigeria that run programmes in Arabic studies and these are categorized into three. The first type runs on traditional method. It follows the traditional line which is marked by antiquity; the method of teaching is outmoded. This type of institutions is still brightly numerous in Nigeria. The second type of institutions is semi-formal institutions. The institutions combine the elements of informal and formal characters. They are run with adequate methods and necessary equipment and manpower. But the proprietors of such institutions decline to include secular subjects in the curriculum of the institutions. Therefore, English courses and other natural science subjects are not included in the curricula. The third type of institutions is formal. Such institutions are run on the pattern of Western institutions.⁷ And apart from Arabic courses which are the basic courses taught in the institutions, English and Education courses are also taught to the students and such institutions are registered, approved and upgraded to College of Education status.

Private Arabic Institutions

There are few private Arabic institutions that award N.C.E. certificates in Arabic studies in Nigeria. Famous among these institutions are:

Table 1:

S/N	Names of Institutions	Abbreviation of the Names of the Institutions
1.	Al-Hikmah College of Education, Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria.	ACOE
2.	Ansar-ud-Deen College of Education, Isolo Oshodi, Lagos State, Nigeria	ANSAR
3.	Assanusiyah College of Education, Ode Omu, Osun State, Nigeria	ASSCOED
4.	Bauchi Institute For Arabic And Islamic Studies, Bauchi, Bauchi State, Nigeria	BIAIS
5.	Mutritadha College of Education, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria	MURITADHA
6.	Jibwis College of Arabic and Islamic Education, Gombe, Gombe State, Nigeria.	JIBWIS
7.	Jama'at Nasir Islam College of Education, Kaduna, Kaduna State, Nigeria.	JAMA'AT
8.	Muftau Lanihun College of Education Oremeji, Ibadan Oyo State, Nigeria.	MULCOED
9.	Muhyildeen College of Education Ilorin, Ilorin Kwara State, Nigeria.	MUYIDEEN
10.	Nana Aishat Memorial College of Education, Ilorin, Kwara State Nigeria.	NAMCO

Source: JAMB Brochure 2014/2015

The private Arabic Colleges run various N.C.E. programmes in Arabic studies. Arabic serves as the basic subject in all available programmes, while other various subjects are combined to Arabic. However, there are about eighteenth subjects combined with Arabic studies. It is note-worthy that some of these institutions combined subjects with Arabic are not run at all in the private Arabic Colleges or institutions. For instance: Arabic/CRS, Arabic/Geography, Arabic/Creative and Fine Arts, Arabic/History, Arabic/Theater, Arabic/Kanuri, Arabic/Igbo, Arabic/Economics and Arabic Yoruba L₂. All these sampled combined courses are not run in private Arabic institutions as shown in JAMB Brochure of 2014/2015.

On the other hand, emphasis is laid on Arabic medium 70% of the institutions run programme in Arabic medium and Arabic/Islamic Studies, while 60% run programmes in Arabic/English and Primary Education, 30% in Arabic/Yoruba and only 10% run programmes in Arabic/Political Science, Arabic/French, Arabic/Hausa and Arabic/Social Studies as shown in table 2 below. It is understood from the above analysis that interest of private Arabic institutions centered on Arabic and Islamic studies. This is followed by Arabic/English Studies and this is so because of the necessity of English Language in Nigeria. And finally, interest is also focused on Primary Education. Beside these four programmes other N.C.E. programmes are not so important to the proprietors and students of private Arabic Colleges of Education that are understudy in Nigeria, as the table 2 below shows.

Table 2
 N.C.E. PROGRAMMES

S/N	N.C.E. Programmes in Nigeria	ACOE	ANSAR	ASSCOED	BIAS	JAMA'AT	JIBWIS	MULCOED	MUYIDEEN	NAMCO	MURITADH
1.	Arabic/CRS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2.	Arabic/English	√	√	√		X	√	√	X	X	√
3.	Primary Education		√	√	X	X	√	√	√	√	X
4.	Arabic/Political Science	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.	Arabic/French			√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.	Arabic/Geography	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7.	Arabic/Creative & Cultural Arts	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8.	Arabic/Hausa	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	X	X
9.	Arabic/History	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10.	Arabic/Theatre Arts	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11.	Arabic/Islamic Studies	√	√	√	X	X	√	√	√	X	√
12.	Arabic/Kanuri	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
13.	Arabic/Social Studies	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√
14.	Arabic/Igbo	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
15.	Arabic/Economics	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
16.	Arabic/Yoruba	X	√	√	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
17.	Arabic/Yoruba L2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
18.	Arabic/Medium	X	X	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√

Table 3

S/N	N.C.E. Programmes in Nigeria	Percentage (%)
1.	Arabic/CRS	0%
2.	Arabic/English	60%
3.	Primary Education	60%
4.	Arabic/Political Science	10
5.	Arabic/French	10%
6.	Arabic/Geography	0%
7.	Arabic/Creative & Cultural Arts	0%
8.	Arabic/Hausa	10%
9.	Arabic/History	0%
10.	Arabic/Theatre Arts	0%
11.	Arabic/ Islamic Studies	70%
12.	Arabic/Kanuri	0%
13.	Arabic/Social Studies	10%
14.	Arabic/Igbo	0%
15.	Arabic/Economics	0%
16.	Arabic/Yoruba	30%
17.	Arabic/Yoruba L2	0%
18.	Arabic Medium	70%

It is obvious from table 3 that emphasis is much placed on Arabic medium as a programme, followed by Arabic/English and primary education programmes.

CHALLENGES FACING ARABIC COLLEGES

Curriculum Content

In the modern age of globalization of science and advanced technology, the issue of relevance of what private Arabic institutions in Nigeria offer to students is of concern. Most of the courses taught in private Arabic institutions are archaic and not relevant to the contemporary needs.⁸ Considered the traditional origin of private Arabic institutions in Nigeria, the sheer lack of renewal of the curricula creates seeming mismatch between what communities need and what institutions offer. It is important to note that most of the private Arabic institutions do not attach much importance to the teaching of English Language they see it as alien subject in the curricula of private Arabic Colleges of Education.⁹ In addition, courses related to information and communication technology are not taught. The resultant effect of this attitude is that the products of private Arabic Colleges will be deficient of educational experiences and orientations that could make students to be self-sufficient and self-employed. Even, they will be denial a gainful employment in the labour markets.

In line with the current globalization trend, information and communication Technology (ICT need to be

incorporated into the curricula of tertiary institutions, it will not only curtail the inferiority trend which products of private Arabic Colleges of Education likely to face in labour markets, but it will give them skills, competencies and orientations that could make them to become job creators rather than job seekers. In view of the foregoing, Oladosu is right when he remarks that:

The private Arabic institutions are characterised by lack of uniform curriculum, exclusion of the official language of the country (English), and information and communication Technology from curricula, teaching of Arabic grammatical concepts, and use of learning experiences which are not valid, comprehensive, variant, suitable and relevant for contemporary learners of the language.¹⁰

Staffing and Staff Development

Research has revealed that most of the private Arabic Colleges in Nigeria are understaffed. Malik remarks that:

In most states in Nigeria, there are no colleges where Arabic teachers are trained. In the Northern states where a few Arabic teachers' colleges exist, the teachers produced in those colleges are few, and as such, they cannot meet the demand for trained Arabic teachers. Hence, there is scarcity of trained Arabic teachers in most states of Nigeria.¹¹

The meaning of the situation is that most of the academic staff is over-worked and many of them could not meet the minimum requirements of research and publications to secure promotion on their posts. In addition many lecturers of low cadre could not secure opportunities for further training, on account of their over-involvement in teaching activities. There are also problems of paucity of staff development policy. Normally, where a staff could not proceed on further training outside the country, there should be some chance for home training, but such chance or opportunity is not available in private Arabic Colleges in Nigeria, because many of such institutions are not ready to sponsor their teaching staff for post graduate programmes. The resultant effect of this is that, without evidence of further or advanced training, staff of such institutions could not move forward or be promoted on time.

Funding of Private Arabic Tertiary Institutions

Another major issue which poses a huge challenge to private Arabic institutions in Nigeria is the problem of funding. This is due to the competing demands on the scarce resources available to the proprietors and sponsors. The funding of private Arabic institutions rests only on the individuals or groups and societies that owned the institutions. Consequent upon this, the outcome of under-funding is that infrastructure could not be developed by way of expansion, or improved and maintained. Each proprietor of institution is left on his own to generate funds to run his institution. Added to this challenge is the rate of education tax charged on the private institutions in Nigeria. Therefore, the future of private Arabic Colleges remains uncertain, if the trend of challenge should continue the situation where proprietors of private Arabic institutions being the source of fund there will be no reliable progress. Therefore, Federal and State governments in Nigeria could enter into partnership with the proprietors of private Arabic Colleges. This seems to be a sure guarantee for growth and expansion of private Arabic institutions in Nigeria. It is worthy of note that severe under-funding makes it impossible for the rehabilitation of infrastructure and construction of new buildings. Funds available mostly go into the payment of salaries and emolument, leaving very little for the procurement of consumables and other materials. So attention to other works is not given, consequently, libraries are stocked preponderantly with obsolete equipments.¹²

Employability of Graduates of Private Arabic Colleges of Education

Many scholars in the education sector have been worried with the problem of employment of graduates of some tertiary institutions especially graduates of private Arabic Colleges, despite the fact that the graduates of private Arabic Colleges in Nigeria have sound and solid foundation in Arabic, employment still poses a big challenge to them. On the reverse, unemployment has accentuated the degree of frustration in Nigeria and increased the decadence of morale in the students and products of private Arabic Colleges. The resultant effect of this is the unhealthy increase in youth unemployment added by negligence of graduates of private Arabic tertiary institutions. However, in response to this challenge some private Arabic Colleges have included in their curricular vocational and technical programmes. In the contemporary global age it should be noted that the relevance of Arabic in the corporate world is very enormous. Arabic is still relevant at industries, companies and banks with corporate links or headquarters in the Arab countries where there is a preference to employ people who are literate in Arabic language.¹³

Access to Information Communication Technology

In our contemporary age of science and technology, information communication technology (ICT) has become

essential tools for progress in teaching and research. But, unfortunately the state of private Arabic in this regard in Nigeria is so poor. It is noteworthy that computer literacy is at its bottom level of development, in the private Arabic Colleges in Nigeria, so also, connection of Arabic institutions to the internet has been noted with remarkable slowness. In many instances this has never been thought to be addressed, many proprietors of private Arabic Colleges are very conservative and so tenacious in antiquity in making research and teaching activities. Access to internet for information communication technology for teaching and research is an issue of necessity. Without access to internet, both teachers and students will be denied in keeping in touch with the modern world of scholarship in teaching, research, publication and professional networking, hardly that one can see a single private Arabic tertiary institution that can boost of information communication technology for her staff. As a way out to tackle this ruinous challenge, the private Arabic Colleges may appeal to state and federal governments and local and international agencies to support ICT development in their tertiary institutions.

Quality and Standard

The issues of quality and qualitative education are central in the educational development in Nigeria. The general expectation is that what is offered in private Arabic Colleges in terms of knowledge, competencies, skills, aptitudes and behavioural ways of acting should fit the need for an active and problem-solving personality in respective of one's discipline. In other words, a completer of N.C.E. education programme should exhibit the capability to acquire and use minimum generic competencies. However, contrary to the expectation, most products of private Arabic Colleges are still deficient in the official language of the country. For instance, many products of private Arabic institutions in Nigeria hardly have any language capacity in terms of communication in the official language. Among the major reason for this that many private Arabic Colleges do not have competent English language lecturers to teach the course appropriately¹⁴ Even though they have sound background in their chosen discipline, the Arabic studies.

Poor Enrolment for Admission

One of the current challenges facing private Arabic Colleges of Education in Nigeria is a paucity of students¹⁵. Some of the reasons account for this, is that Arabic studies is held with contempt, as if it does not have a future or relevance in our contemporary global age, which science is seen as only hope for human salvation and progress. Sequel to the above reason, paucity of students is recorded; many proprietors of private Arabic Colleges of Education thereby make it as a condition of service for lecturers to look for students to boost admission capacity.

Lack of Reading Materials

Another major challenge that is facing private Arabic Colleges is lack of quality works and reading materials for Arabic studies.¹⁵ Many scholars of Arabic still depend on foreign books that are donated to Arabic institutions from Arab countries; many of them are obsolete and are not relevant to our academic environment in Nigeria. The cultural background of the authors of foreign works imported hinted on number of instances made in the works. There are numerous examples and references made in the works which are not known to Nigerian Arabic scholars. In the aspect of Arabic literature, works on Arabic plays and dramas are scanty, Arabic scholars in Nigeria are not writing remarkably in the field; some of Arabic novels used in the Colleges are foreign novels from Arab world.¹⁷ Therefore Arabic students learn but little in Arabic novels, which the themes reflect the socio-economic and political conditions of Nigeria.

Religious Sentiments

There are religious sentiments from non-Muslims, who perceived Arabic as only language of Islam while the strict islamocentric perception of Arabic promoted by Muslim scholars and non Muslims are predisposed to accept this perception of Arabic due to their religious bias are big challenge. The consequence of the situation is their failure to distinguish between Arabic language and Islamic studies as distinct academic disciplines. Ogunbiyi makes an instance of such confusion between Arabic and Islamic studies create by religious atmosphere. For example, in the Nigerian Guardian newspaper of Friday May 15th 1987, under the caption: "Christian parents protect compulsory Islamic instruction for wards."¹⁸ Among those who have involved in this lack of distinction between Arabic and Islamic studies are the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and print media with a particular reference to the Nigerian Guardian. The religious sentiment against Arabic is further intensified with the appearance of the Arabic inscription on all denominations of the Nigeria currency indicating the Naira value in Hausa language written in Arabic script in recognition on all denominations of the Nigeria traders particularly from the north and south west who daily traverse the Nigerian land mass, only literate in the Arabic script through Islamic background. Another side effect of this mixture is the reticence of the federal government of Nigeria to give explicit institutional support to Arabic language as it has openly done to French language.¹⁹ To the proprietors of the sentiment, any official assistance given to Arabic is translated to mean the

spread of Islam.

Conservative Attitude and Rigidity of some Proprietors

Research has revealed that some proprietors of private Arabic Colleges of Education decline to embrace secular subjects in the curricula of studies. They preach and discourage their students and wards to have anything to do with western education. They antagonise the western culture and civilization; because scholarship in western education will expose the cultivator of such education to social vices and erosion of moral values; which are said to be rampant in our society and a major source of predicament in Nigeria. Such proprietors are forced to register their private Arabic institutions with the National Council for Colleges of Education through persuasions and influence mounted on them by Muslim educated class. The happenings of things in Nigeria today are a testimony to attitude of some proprietors to Western education, European culture and civilization. Raji gives a pale picture of the situation:

Nigerian Muslims were embittered that colonial masters accepted English Language for employment while literacy in Arabic was not recognised for practical uses in government and official circle. In such a reaction, the Emir of Katsina speaking on behalf of Northern house of Chiefs demanded to know why English Language should be enriched in the college curriculum as well as inclusion of European teachers in a college set up primarily for Arabic and Islamic law.²⁰

Recommendations

It now remains for some solutions to be offered as strategies of overcoming the identified challenges. The following measures are suggested as solutions.

Private Arabic Colleges should be fully funded by the owners, individuals, organizations or communities. Where meaningful funding is given, institution heads, the Governing Council and the entire management team should use the fund judiciously. Competent and qualified staff should be recruited for quality and quantitative delivery of knowledge. This is necessary since tertiary institutions cannot function effectively without the very best of brains available locally. Therefore, to raise and maintain the quality and standard of teaching, research, and producing students that have comparative and competitive competences, competent and qualified teaching staff is desideratum.

The curricula of educational programmes in the private Arabic Colleges should be overhauled and renewed while courses that are relevant to the contemporary age should be included as defined by the peculiar aspiration of the community. The archaic and outlandish grammatical concepts as pointed out by Oladosu should be deleted in the curricula.²¹ Added to this, in line with the current globalization trend, information and communication technology (ICT) should be incorporated into the Arabic language and literature curriculum so that students of Arabic Colleges would not be abandoned in the competitive labour market. More so the conditions of service of all staff should be improved. This is the surest way of getting the best and retaining the personnel. In most cases, where conditions of service are good, workers are certainly stayed longer on the job. More importantly staff should not be over laboured and dehumanised, there must be an academic freedom.

Staff development programmes must be initiated or put in place for further training of any new staff recruited. And adequate time and funding should be provided for staff pursuing training. Moreso conference attendance for specific number of times per year should be mandatory on all staff, and the authorities of the private Arabia Colleges should assist with fund to allow their staff to attend conferences. If possible, units within the institutions should evolve in-house journals, books and occasional publications to allow for the dissemination of academic researches undertaken by staff, while such publications should be allowed to use for promotion and while graduate empowerment initiative should be put in place. The students that graduate in private Arabic Colleges should be equipped with comparative and competitive competencies; this will empower them to have opportunities for employment either in formal or informal jobs. This is to ensure that self-employment potentials of all students of private tertiary Arabic institutions are boosted such that no graduates of Arabic institutions remain unemployed on the completion of an educational programme. This will guarantee the confidence and high value that make them job creators rather than job seekers.

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the background to the development of private Arabic Institutions in Nigeria; this certainly has a long history. The paper highlights the categories of Arabic Institutions in Nigeria; such as traditional, semi-formal and formal, and only formal one is now upgraded to the status of Colleges of Education. On the aspect of challenges, the paper enumerates several challenges that confront private Arabic Colleges over the years. On the basis of the discussion, solutions were made as measures through which

existing problems may be solved and the challenges of the future would be tackled.

Arabic education has been used in this paper, as a concept to refer to all body of knowledge taught through the medium of Arabic language in private Arabic Institutions in Nigeria. However, the discussion was focused mainly on private Arabic institutions which are now upgraded to status of Colleges of Education, which are collectively increased in number and size. It is hoped that the solutions, when fully utilized, will help to improve the condition of private Arabic Colleges of Education in Nigeria to meet the peculiar aspirations of Nigerians and the global relevance of Arabic education in the 21st Century. It is important that Nigeria government should give explicit institutional support to Arabic studies. This will assist her relationship with some international organizations such as United Nations Organization (U.N.O.), Africa Union (A.U.) and Organizations of Petroleum Exporting Countries (O.P.E.C.), where Arabic is a working language. Nigeria can exchange ideas and experience and also benefit a lot in the area of petro-chemical industrialization through interaction with Arabic countries, which have recorded giant strides in the area.

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