

Influence of Perceived Organizational Politics in Promotion Process on Lecturers' Job Performance at Public Universities in Kenya: A Case of The University of Nairobi

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ABSTRACT

University education has remained a single higher institution that countries rely on for the preparation and skill development reservoir of highly skilled labour force that is much needed to spur economic development through research, teaching and innovation. Universities therefore across the world act as bases of knowledge and hubs for research, information, and expertise productions in all the fields. This requires the performance of qualified and committed academic staff actualize this role. However, the performance of this significant cadre at public universities for instance, is affected by many other factors including organizational politics. The aim of this study was to evaluate the influence of perceived organizational politics in promotion process on lecturers' job performance at public universities in Kenya, a case of the University of Nairobi. The study was guided by two objectives: to examine the influence of nepotism in the process of lecturers' promotion and to determine the influence of perceived ethnicity on lecturers' job performance at the University of Nairobi. Sampling techniques used to sample 11 deans of faculties, 19 chairs of the departments and 100 lecturers and 100 post graduate students were purposive and stratified proportionate sampling and simple random sampling techniques. The main instruments utilized to gather data from respondents for this study were interview guide, open and closed-ended questionnaire, document analysis and focus group discussion. The data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The study established that although there were equal promotion opportunities for both men and female academic staff, the promotion process of the academic staff was perceived to be unfair because it lacked transparency and that patronage and ethnic politics existed. This was perceived to have negative influence on performance. The study concluded that perception of organizational politics in promotion process had negative influence on lecturers' job performance at public universities in Kenya. The study recommends that higher education institutions should ensure fairness and transparency in the promotion process of staff in order to enhance effective lecturers' performance. It is also recommended that a similar study should be carried out in private universities with different management systems to compare the findings since this study focused on public universities.

Keywords: Perceived Organizational Politics, Promotion Process, Lecturers' Job Performance

INTRODUCTION

University education has remained a single higher institution that countries rely on for the preparation and skill development reservoir of highly skilled labour force that is much needed to spur economic development through research, teaching and innovation. Universities therefore across the world act as bases of knowledge and hubs for research, information, and expertise productions in all the fields. In order for these institutions to play this role they will require qualified and committed lecturers (University Act, 2012). However, the performance of this significant cadre at public universities for instance, is affected by many other factors including organizational politics.

The term organizational politics is a summative term that puts together a series of activities that happen

within organizations including universities that affect employees in achievement of their personal goals and contribution towards the institutions (Olorunleke, 2015). According to Ferris, Ellen, McAllister, and Maher (2019), organizational politics refers to the actions and events happening in an organization where individuals get hold of power and resources to those that they prefer. Bouckenoghe, Zafar and Raja (2015) describe it as a deliberate use of power by individuals to satisfy personal interests and goals within their workplace. According to Onyeyiichukwu and Agbaeze, (2019) organizational politics is subtle and omnipresent and can affect organizational processes. It is a pervasive and inescapable part of an organization's social fabric (Dappa, Bhatti, and Aljarah, 2019) which can influence employees' behaviour towards performance.

Employees may perceive their workplace as political if they are subjected to unjustified demands, lobbying or behaviors like favoritism and rigid organizational structures, in the promotion process (Okeke and Ifeyinwa, 2019). Playing politics in organization is actually focusing more on one's own interests than on those of the company (Attah, 2016). Employees' perceptions of organizational politics are likely to affect them adversely. It can cause careless behavior and obstructionist organizational practices among employees including decreased commitment to the organization, decreased task performance, restricted organizational citizenship, and satisfaction with work results (Bwonya, Ogutu, and Okeyo, 2020, Asrar-ul-Haq, Anwar, and Igbal (2019). This is likely to cause damage to organizational achievement.

University lecturers in any institution of higher learning, like other employees in organizations, are individuals, who over time have accrued experience, competencies, skills, and peculiarities that make them dynamic in their work environment. Therefore organizational politics can be a factor that may affect how the efforts, skills and expertise of the lecturers is earnest in their performance of duties for the attainment of institutional goals in the education system. Lecturers job performance as defined by many scholars can be taken to mean the extent to which lecturers complete their assigned tasks (Namutebi, 2019; Onoyase, 2017 and Alfagira, Zumrah and Noor 2017, Awodiji, Oluwalola, Ogbudinkpa and Awotunde 2020). As they discharge their duties, lecturers will naturally expect promotion from one grade to another.

Promotion of employees in any organization is one of the significant aspects used widely to increase individuals' work morale that may lead to institutional achievements (Altbach 2015). It is generally believed that the success of any institution is directly linked to the performance of those who work for it (Ombanda, 2018 and Djabatey, 2012). There are two commonly used criteria to bring about fairness and equity in the promotion exercise of lecturers in institutions of higher learning; the Merit-Based-System (MBS) and Seniority-Based-System (SBS) as outlined by Phelan and Zhiang (2000) in the book *"Promotion systems and organizational performance."*

Under merit based system, lectures are promoted based on well laid down criteria and once an individual attains them, he or she is promoted unconditionally. Whereas the seniority based criteria one is promoted based on the number of years one has been in an organization. However, even with well-established systems in place many institutions still battle with numerous challenges surrounding promotion of their employees.

Perception of favoritism, nepotism and discrimination during promotion process may lead to high politicking among employees. If employees are in competition for promotion and there is a preferred individuals by the system or management, the chances of others who may merit but not preferred to get promoted is low. The under-performance of employees may set in under such circumstances. The institution may in the process also lose as a result of institution locking out capable people who would have significantly contributed and impacted on institution's performance due politics. For example in Pakistan, perception of favoritism in promotion of academic staff in one of the private colleges led to decrease in lecturers' general performance that resulted into the institution dropping in ranking in the country (Ahamed and Sadia, 2018). Perceived discrimination of the minority groups in western countries emanating from the feeling that the marginalized groups stagnated in their promotion while their counterpart progressed

negatively affected performance at the higher institutions of learning in those countries (Zhang, Zhong, Wana, Chang, Hu and Ouyang, 2018). This not only affected institutional achievement but also brought about conflicts among employees themselves. As the employees wrangle the institutions suffer the consequences.

It is also noted that promotion of the academic staff in most African public universities tend to take long due to extensive measures, lack of transparency and non-adherence to lay down procedures (Mushemaza, 2016). Rigid institutional policies, delay in promotion, favoritism, unclear parameters and lack of transparency were some of the major challenges which affected staff progression in one of the public universities in Ghana (Amegatsy, Odoom, Arpoh-Baah and Okyere, 2018).

Although the Commission for University Education (CUE) in Kenya has tried to streamline and harmonize promotion and appointment criteria of academic staff in public universities, there are still hiccups in promotion of lecturers in public universities. The CUE guidelines and standards were perceived to be discriminative, unjust and misleading because the criteria failed to recognize the relative contributions of various cadres of academic staff in their performance (UASU, 2018).

Although the relationship between nepotism, ethnicity and job performance is not clear in various studies done in Kenya's institutions of higher learning, a study by Taalui (2017) signals that there is a looming trend of ethnic consideration in promotions of lecturers in Kenyan public universities. Where there is a presence of the high number of academic staff, students and the diversity in the faculties and programmes like the situation at the University of Nairobi, organizational politics cannot miss. For instance, during the preparation of the institution's Strategic Plan of 2013-2018 various departments expressed their frailties touching on issues experienced by lecturers that to have restricted lecturers' effective performance such as: Lack of staff development strategies; unfairness in pay policies, perceived unfairness in utilization of funds generated by departments (Faculty of Health Science), under reporting of research, consultancy and outreach activities (Faculty of Art and Social Sciences) and poor work environment due to inadequate, poorly maintained teaching and learning facilities (Faculty of Education). Hence this study that aimed at investigating on the influence of organizational politics on lecturers' job performance at public universities in Kenya. Therefore narrows down this study to its negative effects on performance because the counterproductive behaviour of organizational politics in the workplace is likely to disrupt lecturers in performance of their role tasks.

Amid the interests and studies done on the matter of perceived organizational politics and its relationship with job performance, by many scholars; Castanheira, Sguera and Story 2021; Salat and Rintari, 2021; Bhattarai, 2021 and Okeke and Ifeyinwa, 2019, the results are still far from being generalized due to the settings of the studies. Their results reported varied findings. Therefore there is need for further investigation on its influence in public universities particularly on lecturers' job performance based on the promotion process.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the influence of nepotism in the process of lecturers' promotion on their job performance at the University of Nairobi.
2. To determine the influence of perceived ethnicity in the promotion process of the lecturers' on their job performance at the University of Nairobi.

Research questions

In order to realize the objectives, the following research questions were used and the hypothesis was tested;

H01: There is no statistical relationship between perceived organizational politics in promotion process and lecturers' job performance in public universities' in Kenya.

1. How does perceived nepotism in the lecturers' promotion process affect their work at the University of Nairobi?
2. How does perceived ethnicity in the lecturers' promotion process influence their work at the University of Nairobi?

Significance of the study

The findings of the study may be of beneficial to university management on application of best practices in management of academic staff which is anchored on fairness, equity and transparency in promotion policies. Further, managers may use the results of this study to enhance the management system which in the process improve lecturers' performance. Finally, it is hoped to offer data which may form the base for further research in the discipline.

Limitations of the study

Due to Covid-19 pandemic there was a change from face-to-face collection of data to online collection. Therefore getting emails and contacts of deans of faculties, chairs of departments and lecturers posed a challenge. However, the university's human resource and quality assurance offices played a great role in obtaining the needed information.

Getting access to some of the confidential documents which were essential to this study, especially lecturers' complaints about performance and promotion was a challenge. However, the researchers analyzed the extracts from the weaknesses and threads stated in the university's Strategic Plans of 2013-2018 and 2018-2023.

Getting the university's deans of faculties for interview was also a challenge because of the nature of their work which comprises virtual meetings and other administrative duties. However, to mitigate this, the researchers called to book an appropriate time for interview with them in advance.

Delay in responding to the emails was one of the challenges witnessed among the lecturers and chairs of departments. However, to mitigate this the researchers used a variety of strategies to encourage the respondents to complete the questionnaire including sending three email reminders to them. This bore fruits to considerable number.

Assumptions of the study

It was assumed that:

1. That organizational politics was present at the University of Nairobi and that it influences lecturers' job performance.
2. That there were policies in place guiding promotion at the University of Nairobi.
3. That there were records of lecturers' complaints on promotion criterion at the University of Nairobi.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study benefited from a mixed method of both phenomenological and descriptive designs. According to Umanilo (2019), phenomenological study investigates human behavior, what they say and what they do, as a product of how people perceive the situations. The design is concern with the study of perceptions and

experiences from perspective of people (Binu, 2015). Descriptive design on the other hand was used in this study to allow the researchers gather information from respondents’ in their natural environment. The design helped to generate both numerical and descriptive data that was used in measuring relationships between variables to give a holistic understanding of the research topic and produced statistical information about perceived organizational politics and its influence on lecturers’ job performance. The target population for the study consisted 11 deans of faculties, 63 chairs of departments, 1379 academic staff and 3168 post graduate students (masters and PhD) being a total of 4617 according to the data obtained from Student Management Information System (SMIS, 2023), and Human Resource Department (2023) of the University of Nairobi.

Deans of faculties, chairs of departments and lecturers were targeted as the main respondents for this study because of their strategic positions in the university functionality hence able to understand about perception of organizational politics vis-a-vis the university policies. The sample size consisted of 11 deans, 19 chairs of departments 100 lecturers and 100 post graduate students distributed as in Table 1

Table 1 Sample Size Distribution

Faculties	Deans of faculties	Chairs of departments	Lecturers 30%	Students		Total
				Masters 10%	PhD 10%	
Agriculture	1	1	5	4	1	12
Arts and social sciences	1	4	20	9	7	41
Build environment and design	1	1	2	2	1	7
Business management sciences	1	1	7	19	2	30
Education	1	2	7	7	7	24
Engineering	1	2	9	3	1	16
Health sciences	1	5	25	13	7	51
Law	1	0	2	2	0	5
Science and technology	1	2	15	6	5	29
Veterinary medicine	1	1	8	4	0	14
Total	10	19	100	69	31	229

The main research instruments were interviews for deans of faculties, questionnaires for chair persons and lecturers and focus group discussion for the students. The other instrument was document analysis. Collected data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The first objective of the study examined the influence of nepotism in the process of lecturers’ promotion on their job performance at the University of Nairobi. To achieve this objective data was collected on various aspects that may be underplay in an institution. One of them is gender. This study sought to establish whether there were equal promotion opportunities for both male and female academic staff in the institution.

This was aimed at establishing whether there was fairness in promotion of academic staff based on gender. A positive statement stating, “There are equal promotion opportunities for both male and female academic staff in this department” was put to the chairs of departments and lecturers to respond. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Academic staff’s response on equal promotion opportunities

	Lecturers		Chairs of departments	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
SA	20	28.6	6	40.0
A	30	42.9	5	33.3
UD	10	14.3	1	6.6
D	5	7.1	2	13.3
SD	5	7.1	1	6.3
Total	70	100	15	100

The results presented in Table 2 indicated that the majority of both lecturers (over71%) and chairs of the departments (over 73%) felt that there were equal promotion opportunities for both male and female academic staff in the institution. This implies that the academic staff were satisfied with fairness embraced in promotion process on basis of gender. These findings concurred with what was established from the deans in the interview where most of them (50%) felt that promotion process was fair. One of the deans commented:

“We all compete for the same positions using the same promotion guideline... there are no positions preserved for a particular gender...”

Based on the findings it can be argued that promotion of lecturers did not favour any gender. The finding contradict that in the study by Malelu, Ngure and Okemwa (2017) which established that there were favoritism in promotion process and negative office politics which affected promotion of women in one of the public universities in Kenya.

The researchers sought to establish whether there was transparency in promotion of the academic staff at the institution. This was aimed at establishing whether there ware grievances on the same which would affect lecturers’ performance. Transparency in management is a vital aspect that determines the success or failure of an organization, once constantly applied as a principle of management it empowers the institution to overcome hindrances such as; corruption, bias, discrimination and all types of hidden vices that have deleterious impact on the growth of the organization (Kalokora and Lekule,2019). Therefore a negative statement stating, “In this institution promotion process lack transparency” was presented and was scored as captured in Table 3.

Table 3 The academic staff’s response on transparency in promotion process

	Lecturers		Chairs of departments	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
SA	22	31.42	4	26.66
A	26	37.14	4	26.66

UD	7	10	2	13.33
D	12	17.14	3	26.66
SD	3	4.28	2	13.33
Total	70	100	15	100

The finding in Table 3 shows that the majority of the chairs of department (over 53% and lecturers (over 68%) either agreed or strongly agreed that there was no transparency in promotion of the academic staff in the institution. However, the finding from the chairs of the departments and lecturers was not in line with what was captured from the deans of faculties through interview. Most of them (over 45percent) felt that promotion process was fair. One of the deans commented:

“...There is a display or an advert stating all what is required from an individual for promotion to a certain position, those who qualify are interviewed in a panel.”

Another dean had this to say:

“Indeed there are promotion procedures in place which guide the whole process, however there are other measures that are not made public such as the need for regional or gender balancing among the staff... may be such acts are perceived as unfair process.”

The variation in perception of the academics staff is understood in terms of the positions held by the deans in which they are directly or indirectly involved in promotion exercise in the institution. Nonetheless, the fact that there are other measures unknown to the rest of the academic staff may be perceived as unfair. Based on the finding therefore it can be argued there is possibility of favoritism and nepotism in promotion of academic staff which may negatively influence their performance.

To ascertain the assertion of favoritism and nepotism in promotion at the institution, researchers sought to establish whether the promotion of the academic staff favored lecturers with come link with specific people in the institution. This was to determine whether there was merit in the promotion process. Martin (2009) pointed out that academia is commonly seen as an arena in which merit plays a stronger role than in many other occupations. The negative statement stating, “Patronage and favoritism rather than merit determines who gets a head in this institution” was presented to the chairs of departments and lecturers who scored. The findings are captured in Table 4.

Table 4 Response on patronage and favoritism in promotion process

	Lecturers		Chairs of departments	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
SA	19	27.14	2	13.3
A	29	41.42	3	20
UD	3	4.28	2	13.33
D	14	20	7	46.66
SD	5	7.14	1	6.6
Total	70	100	15	100

Table 4 presents the findings on use of patronage and favoritism in promotion. While the majority of the chairs of departments (over 53%) felt that promotion process was based on merit, the majority of the

lecturers (over 68%) felt that promotion of the academic staff was based on patronage and favoritism. There were mixed reactions in the findings obtained through interview too. Most of the deans felt that promotion process was on merit while other share their own experience that suggest that there was favoritism. One of the deans narrated the experiences as captured:

“...Even with promotion criteria in place, there are still some lecturers who pass through backdoors...I suffered the consequences of this corruption... I did an interview for promotion and I qualified as the best candidate. However, there was a delay in effecting the promotion. Only to see another advert on the same position in the name of, ‘the results of the previous interview could not be found’... Isn’t that politic of searching for the candidate of their choice for the position? Well, I resubmitted my documents for the interview, but this time round I was not shortlisted...I had to wait for long for another chance to come.”

Therefore based on these findings, it is more likely that patronage politics and favoritism influenced the promotion process in the institution.

The second objective of the study was on ethnicity as a promotion criterion. Thus the statement in objective was sought to establish whether promotions of the academic staff were based on ethnic considerations. This was aimed at establishing whether politics of ethnicity affected the promotion process in the institution. The negative statement, “Sometimes promotions in this institution are based on ethnic considerations,” was put to the chairs of departments and lecturers who scored. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 The academic staff’s response on ethnic considerations in promotions

	Lecturers		Chairs of departments	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
SA	18	25.7	1	6.6
A	23	32.85	4	26.6
UD	5	7.14	1	6.6
D	12	24.3	4	26.6
SD	12	24.3	5	33.0
Total	70	100	15	100

The majority of the chairs of departments (about 60%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that promotion of academic staff was based on ethnic considerations. On contrary the majority of the lecturers (about 60%) felt that the final choice of the candidates in promotion process was based on ethnic considerations. The contradiction in the position of the two parties is understood as one party (departmental chairs) is viewed to be promoter of the same while the other party (lecturers) is viewed as a victim. However, during the interview with the deans of faculty, one of them brought up the idea of positive ethnic consideration in the promotion process as stated:

“...There are over 42 different tribes in Kenya. Some time we apply ethnic consideration principle in the promotion process as a way of addressing marginalized groups.”

The statement suggests that ethnicity in promotion process can either be employed for positive or negative gain. Positive aspect of ethnicity promotion may be used in balancing the academic staff, while negative ethnicity may be used to achieve personal gains hence organizational politics. in whatever reason merit is compromised in the name of balancing staff and this may affect institutional performance in the long run. Based on the findings therefore it is more likely that ethnicity influenced the promotion process in the

institution either for positive gain or as part of organizational politics. The findings are similar to that in the study by Gudo (2016) which established that ethnic consideration was used in promotion and appointment of academic staff to take up positions of senior management in public and private universities in Kenya.

Further, the researchers wanted to find out the views of the academic staff in regard to fairness of promotion process in the institution. This was to find out more information on promotion process that may not have been captured in the responded questions. The respondents, the chairs of departments and the lecturers, were requested to retort to the open-ended question, “How fair is the promotion of academic staff in this institution?” Their responses were summarized and presented in Table 6.

Table 6 The academic staff’s responses on fairness in promotion

	Chairs of departments		Lecturers	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Fair	8	53.3	20	28.6
Not fair	5	33.3	42	60
undecided	2	13.3	8	11.4
Total	15	100	70	100

The majority of the lecturers (60%) felt that the promotion process was not fair. Some of the key reasons captured were: lack of transparency, credibility, sometimes merit and presences of ethnic and nepotism considerations. However, the majority of the chairs of the departments (over 53%) were of the opinion that promotion of the academic staff was fair. Some of the key reasons given were: that there are systems in place that guide promotions process and that there are no major complaints as far as promotion of lecturers is concern. This finding was supported by the information obtained through interview with deans of faculties where a half of them were of the opinion that promotion process was fair. Some of the reasons they gave were that promotion process offered equal opportunity for both male and female academic staff and that promotion guidelines in place were followed. One of the deans stated:

“...There is a display or an advert stating all what is required from an individual for promotion to a certain position, those who qualify are interviewed in a panel. So, in my view, the challenge is on individual effort and not the promotion process.”

On the same vein another dean said:

“So far it is fair...the guideline are clear to everyone. So if a lecturer can work smart in terms of article publications, book authoring and of cause take care of core mandate, nothing can stop him/her promotion. The panel’s responsibility during interview is very easy, verification of supportive documents and giving verdict.”

On the basis of this finding, it is noted with concern that the percentage of those were of the opinion that the promotion process was fair was slightly above average (response from the chairs of departments and deans of faculties). This may imply that promotion process in the institution is perceived as unfair which may have negative effect on lecturers’ performance.

The students were entreated to report on how the academic staff performed their duties in teaching and guiding them in the projects and thesis process. It was reported that some students were discriminated upon based on ethnic background especially when it comes to thesis examination. As a result some of the students have taken long to graduate, others have dropped because they are frustrated by their supervisors. These

findings affirm what was established in the study by Taaliu (2017) that the post-graduate students who come from “other tribes” may drop out or take more time to graduate because of frustration of supervisors who are not members of the students’ ethnic group. This is a clear indication that organizational politics in form of ethnicity and patronage negatively influence lecturers’ job performance of their duty.

The researchers went further to test the hypothesis to determine whether there was a significant relationship between perceived organizational politics in promotion process and lecturers job performance. Chi Square (χ^2) test was used to test the hypothesis using the information obtained from both the chairs of departments and the lecturers. Their findings are presented Table 7 and Table 8.

H_{01} : There is no statistical relationship between perceived organizational politics in promotion and lecturers’ job performance in public universities’ in Kenya.

Table 7 Relationship between perceived politics in promotion process and lecturers’ job performance (lecturers)

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.759 ^a	24	.710
Likelihood Ratio	26.174	24	.344
Linear-by-Linear Association	.281	1	.596
N of Valid Cases	70		

a. 38 cells (97.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .21.

Table 7 shows the response of lectures on relationship between perceived organizational politics in promotion and their job performance. The Pearson Chi Square (Pearson Value (χ^2) 19.759, df=24) has a p-value of 0.710 which is greater than the level of significance 0.05 (P-value $0.710 > 0.05$ level of significance).

Table 8 Relationship between perceived politics in promotion criteria and lecturers’ job performance (chairs of departments)

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.214 ^a	18	.442
Likelihood Ratio	20.728	18	.293
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.402	1	.065
N of Valid Cases	15		

a. 30 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .27

Table 8 shows the response of chairs of departments on relationship between perceived organizational politics in promotion and lecturers’ job performance. The Pearson Chi Square (Pearson Value (χ^2) 18.214, df=18) has a p-value of 0.442 which is greater than the level of significance 0.05 (P-value $0.442 > 0.05$ level of significance).

With the p-value of 0.710 (lecturers) and 0.442 (chairs of department), the study results indicates that there is a significant relationship between perceived organizational politics in promotion process and lecturers’

job performance. Therefore the study rejects the null hypothesis (promotion has no significant influence on lecturers' job performance).

CONCLUSIONS

The study established that although there were equal promotion opportunities for both men and female academic staff, the promotion process of the academic staff in the institution was perceived to be unfair because it lacked transparency and that patronage and ethnic politics existed. This was perceived to have negative influence on performance. The study concluded that perception of organizational politics in promotion process had negative influence on lecturers' job performance at public universities in Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that higher education institutions should ensure fairness and transparency in the promotion process of staff in order to enhance effective lecturers' performance. It is also recommended that a similar study should be carried out in private universities with different management systems to compare the findings since this study focused on public universities in Kenya.

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