Issues and Trends Encountered by Educators Among Selected Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Schools in the Philippines

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Abstract

This paper examines the issues and trends encountered by educators in selected Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) schools across the Philippines. Despite the Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015) aimed at culturally contextualizing the K to 12 curriculum for 1.2 million indigenous students, significant challenges persist.

Key issues include a lack of formal training for non-indigenous teachers in indigenous values and pedagogies, the marginalization of community elders in decision-making, and the profound scarcity of culturally contextualized learning materials. Educators also navigate physical accessibility barriers, limited inter-agency synergy, and the absence of specialized indigenous education in teacher training programs. Socio-economic factors, traditional gender roles, and the prevalence of Tagalog as a medium of instruction contribute to high dropout rates and academic struggles. Furthermore, a digital divide, systemic biases, and the exclusion of indigenous content from curricula undermine students' sense of cultural value.

The findings highlight the critical need for a rights-based, interface model of education. Solutions involve empowering educators as agents of change, actively involving indigenous communities in curriculum development, and integrating local knowledge systems into core subjects. This approach aims to cultivate equitable and empowering learning environments that honor the rich diversity and heritage of indigenous peoples, enabling students to bridge modern education with their ancestral realities.

Keywords: *Indigenous Education, Educators, Cultural Contextualization, Educational Disparities*

1. Introduction

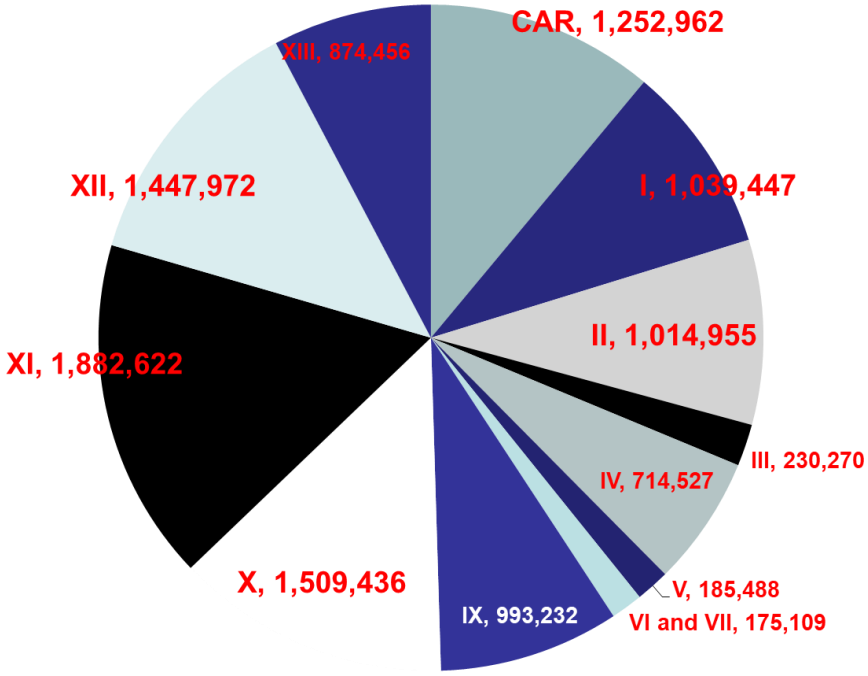
This paper explores the issues and trends encountered by educators in selected Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) schools in the Philippines. The Philippines is a linguistically diverse nation, with 187 individual languages listed, 183 of which are living. A significant majority, 175, are indigenous

languages. Among these, 41 are institutional, 72 are developing, 45 are vigorous, 14 are in trouble, and 11 are dying. This rich linguistic heritage underscores the importance of culturally sensitive education.

Furthermore, a substantial portion of the student population belongs to indigenous groups. Out of 20.8 million students enrolled in elementary and high schools across the Philippines, 5.7 percent—approximately 1.2 million—are indigenous. Recognizing the unique educational needs of these learners, the Department of Education (DepEd) adopted the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015). This framework aims to guide schools and education programs in collaborating with indigenous communities to contextualize the K to 12 Curriculum, ensuring it aligns with their respective cultural contexts and knowledge systems. Despite these institutional efforts, many non-indigenous teachers remain ill-equipped to implement such frameworks effectively, often due to a lack of formal training in the complexities of indigenous values and traditional pedagogical methods [1], [2]. which is further exacerbated by the exclusion of community elders from the decision-making processes that determine the educational goals and direction of local schools [1]. Consequently, this marginalization contributes to alarmingly high dropout rates and lower school attendance compared to the general population, leaving indigenous children particularly vulnerable to systemic exclusion [3]. This issue is compounded by a profound lack of learning materials that reflect indigenous realities, as the absence of culturally contextualized resources and government-funded support services frequently isolates learners within mainstream educational environments [1]. In addition to these pedagogical hurdles, physical accessibility remains a critical barrier as indigenous families often have significantly greater proximity to primary schools than to secondary institutions, which are typically concentrated in municipal centers rather than local barangays [4]. This geographical divide necessitates the development of alternative learning paths, such as personalized e-learning or equivalency programs, which have proven effective in cultivating life-long competencies outside the walls of the formal school system [5]. One major institutional hurdle to this goal is the limited synergy between government bodies, as the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples provides oversight for tribal traditions but lacks the mandate and budget to manage public schools, leaving the Department of Education to handle the complex task of curriculum re-orientation on its own [5]. This institutional gap is further widened by the fact that teacher education programs and related degree courses currently omit specialized subjects on indigenous education, leaving graduates without the theoretical foundation or content knowledge necessary to navigate culturally sensitive instructional requirements [6]. Beyond these academic shortcomings, educators must also contend with deep-seated social dynamics within communities, where traditional gender roles may prioritize the education of boys over girls and financial constraints often force children to abandon their studies to assist with household labor or contribute to family income [7]. Moreover, the prevalence of Tagalog as the primary medium of instruction frequently alienates learners who struggle to grasp complex lessons delivered in a language other than their own [7]. This language barrier is further intensified by the scarcity of mother-tongue learning materials for grade levels beyond the third year, forcing teachers to manually translate English textbooks into local dialects to facilitate student comprehension [5]. This pedagogical strain is worsened by the fact that some indigenous families perceive their native languages as a hindrance to modern literacy, creating a

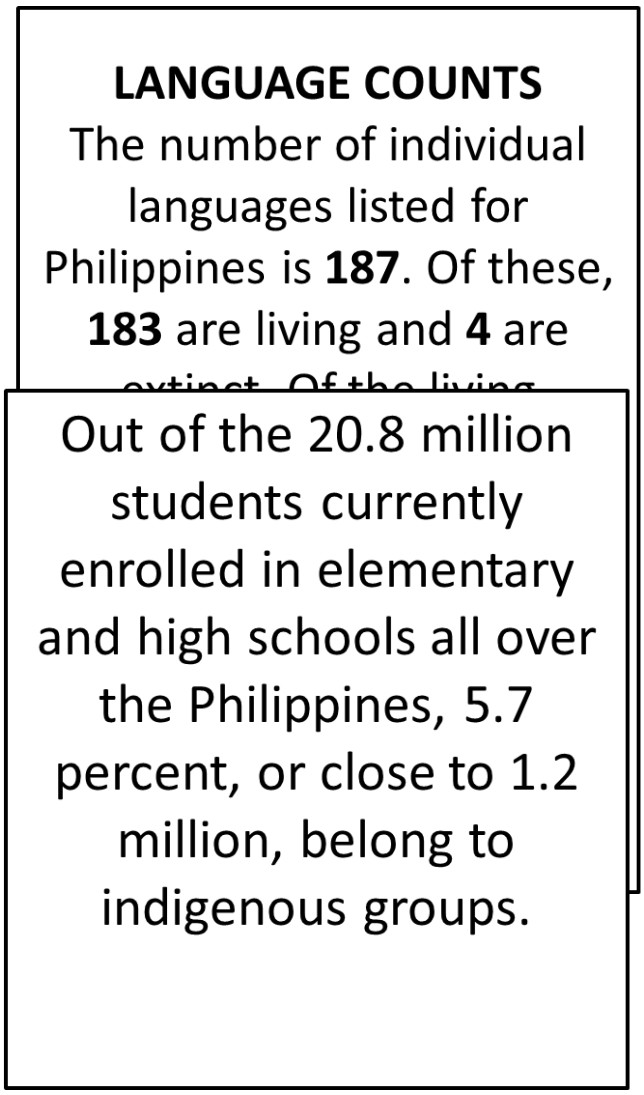
generational divide where younger learners may show disinterest in their heritage due to a fear of judgment or the pervasive influence of modern technology [8]. This digital intrusion is often paired with a "second-level digital divide," where a lack of high-quality devices and stable internet access in remote locations prevents indigenous students from meaningfully engaging with online educational resources or research tools [9], [10]. ultimately leaving them with underdeveloped digital literacy and viewing skills that are necessary to meet national educational standards [8].

In addition to language barriers, teachers must navigate a fundamental mismatch between classroom discipline and the traditional socialization practices of the indigenous home, often resulting in educators inadvertently tolerating academic failure because they hold lower expectations for the innate abilities of indigenous students [1], [7]. This systemic bias is often reinforced by teachers' lack of proficiency in indigenous languages, as the shortage of certified educators from within these communities forces reliance on urban-based teachers who lack the formal credentials or linguistic skills required to deliver instruction in minority dialects like Northern Quechua [11]. This mismatch is particularly detrimental during assessments, as students in countries like Peru, Turkey, and Guatemala who are tested in a language other than their home tongue consistently emerge as the lowest performers in core subjects like mathematics [12]. Furthermore, the exclusion of indigenous content from formal curricula often causes students to question the inherent value of their own traditions, leading them to dismiss their cultural heritage as unimportant or to hide their identity in an effort to conform to mainstream social expectations [13].



The Philippines, home of a large variety of languages, will absorb a high death toll of languages unless urgent measures are adopted to preserve them. The past few decades have witnessed the extinction of such languages as Agta Villa Viciosa, Agta Dicamay, Ayta Tayabas, and Ermiteño; many Filipino languages are now on the endangered list.

This erosion of linguistic diversity is deeply rooted in national policies that favor a bilingual approach using only Filipino and English, effectively rendering the school environment a foreign space for students from minority backgrounds who lack proficiency in these national languages [14]. This policy framework often leads to students being actively penalized for utilizing their home languages within "English zones" of their schools, as educators frequently reinforce the idea that Western languages are the only gateway to the "real world" [15]. This subtractive model of bilingualism not only marginalizes the use of the mother tongue but also fosters a generational disconnect, as Mapuche students and families are frequently advised to relegate their ancestral "dialects" to the home environment to avoid academic disadvantage [16]. This pedagogical disconnect is further exacerbated by the fact that even when bilingual intercultural policies are in place, they rarely evolve into trilingual models that incorporate English alongside indigenous languages and Spanish, often leaving rural learners with extremely low proficiency due to a reliance on rote grammar translation and a lack of culturally relevant materials [17].



Consequently, intercultural subjects are often relegated to optional modules or isolated lessons on folk traditions rather than comprehensive language instruction, a dynamic that diminishes the perceived value of native speakers and often leads to indigenous students being assigned to remedial roles or basic tasks within the school hierarchy [18].

One of the prominent issues faced by educators in IPEd schools is the persistent gap in educational access and attainment between indigenous and non-indigenous students. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity and equity in education, indigenous learners often face barriers such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural marginalization. This educational disparity perpetuates cycles of poverty and reinforces systemic inequalities within indigenous communities.One

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The goal of this inquiry is to highlight the complexities educators face in delivering equitable and empowering education that honors the rich diversity and heritage of indigenous peoples.

2. Methodology

[INFORMATION MISSING]: The provided slides do not include details on the research methodology employed. This section would typically describe:
Research Design (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods)
Participants and Sampling (e.g., number of educators, schools, selection criteria)
Data Collection Instruments (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, observations)

Data Analysis Procedures (e.g., thematic analysis, statistical analysis)

Ethical Considerations: This missing component would address the protocols for obtaining informed consent and ensuring the anonymity of participants from vulnerable Indigenous populations to prevent further social exploitation [11]. - **Significance of the Study**: This inquiry aims to bridge the gap between national mandates and classroom reality, particularly in identifying how institutional support serves as either a critical enabler or a barrier to integrating gender and cultural perspectives within pedagogy [19]. Beyond institutional constraints, teachers must also navigate the dual burdens of students who balance academic duties with community expectations, such as providing household income or caring for siblings, which frequently results in higher absenteeism and dropout rates [20], [9]. further compounded by the migration of qualified teachers who leave for urban centers or international positions due to underprivileged working conditions and low compensation in remote indigenous municipalities [2]. In addition to these logistical hurdles, indigenous students frequently encounter a digital divide characterized by a lack of basic hardware like cellphones and gadgets for research, or unstable internet connectivity in their ancestral locations, which severely limits their participation in modern educational frameworks [9]. Beyond these technological gaps, the integrity of the educational experience is often compromised by the misuse of designated funding, with some indigenous students reporting that financial assistance intended for their academic support is instead redirected by political leaders toward ceremonial events or regional summits [1]. Furthermore, researchers note that even when institutional mandates for inclusion exist, a significant disconnection persists between policy and practice, as educators often lack the specific training and professional support required to translate these frameworks into transformative classroom strategies [19]. This systemic failure is highlighted by faculty members in Philippine Higher Education Institutions who report that, in the absence of standardized guidelines and official training, the integration of cultural and gender perspectives remains heavily reliant on the personal initiative and interest of individual instructors [19]. This lack of oversight is further validated by observations that institutional commitment rarely extends to monitoring how inclusivity training is actually applied in teaching, leaving many to assume that mere attendance at a seminar guarantees the successful integration of these complex socio-cultural values [19]. Moreover, this precarious implementation is undermined by geographical isolation and a lack of reliable public transport, which forces many students to miss school when they cannot reach highways in time to catch passing transit vehicles [1], [13].

3. Results

The findings from Mamanwa indigenous learners indicate that the topmost barrier to educational success is the insufficiency of financial assistance from local governments, a deficit often exacerbated by the suspension of subsidies during public health crises and the lack of funding for learning materials [1]. Additionally, the instability of household finances often forces these students to engage in underpaid manual labor, such as construction or pastoralism, to secure basic necessities like lunch food [1]. This financial strain is further intensified by an inequitable distribution of resources, as indigenous learners frequently observe that they do not receive the same educational benefits and privileges granted to their non-indigenous counterparts [1]. Furthermore, traditional belief systems in remote indigenous groups sometimes prioritize male education, creating an additional gender-based disparity that hinders the academic achievement of female students [7].

This gendered investment gap is often reinforced by parental attitudes that view education for sons as a more worthwhile long-term financial commitment than for daughters [21]. In addition to these socio-economic and cultural hurdles, faculty members perceive the integration of Gender Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity initiatives as largely symbolic, citing a lack of standardized strategies and weak policy enforcement that fails to translate institutional mandates into measurable curricular outcomes [22]. Beyond the classroom, structural inequities within higher education institutions further stifle progress, as women of color and faculty with intersectional identities face compounded barriers to recruitment and advancement that limit their influence on long-term institutional policy [23]. In addition to these structural obstacles, the physical isolation of ancestral lands creates a semi-permanent geographic barrier where the absence of farm-to-market roads necessitates long, arduous treks on foot, frequently causing students to arrive late or miss classes entirely [1]. This geographic exclusion is exacerbated by a pervasive language barrier, where IP learners report a significant inability to comprehend core lessons because the medium of instruction does not align with their native dialects [9]. Outside of these pedagogical mismatches, the survival of students within the mainstream system is primarily threatened by severe socio-economic hardship, which remains the preeminent obstacle to academic achievement among Indigenous populations [1], [24]. yet the problem is worsened by institutional perceptions that prioritize performative gestures over the pragmatic, direct support mechanisms—such as enhanced financial aid and robust academic resources—that students identify as their most critical needs [25]. To address these systemic failings, it is essential to shift from tokenistic gestures toward the integration of indigenous languages and traditions into pedagogy, which has been shown to improve literacy and student retention while positioning formal education as a complement to community knowledge [26]. This transformation requires that higher education institutions deepen their engagement with Tribal Colleges and local leaders to develop collaborative strategies that genuinely reflect the specific priorities and self-identified needs of the indigenous populations they serve [25].

Implementing such an approach would also require a fundamental shift in institutional demographics, particularly by addressing the near-total absence of indigenous faculty members whose lived experiences are vital for fostering "racial literacy" and authentic intercultural dialogue [27]. To support this inclusive environment, universities should also consider amending attendance policies to accommodate cultural and familial obligations, ensuring that the pursuit of a degree does not force students to abandon their human rights or traditional community responsibilities [28]. Physical infrastructure must also evolve to support these students, through the provision of on-campus family housing, daycare services, and dedicated offices for Elders to provide necessary spiritual and social counseling [29]. Beyond these spatial modifications, schools must also overcome the lack of comprehensive curricula in Indigenous languages, ensuring that the history, arts, and customs of each unique community are systematically preserved and passed down to subsequent generations [30]. To achieve this, universities must restructure their recognition systems to validate the expertise of Indigenous Knowledge Keepers through traditional standards rather than colonial academic credentials [31]. In tandem with these pedagogical reforms, institutions must facilitate peer mentorship programs that connect younger learners with upper-year students and recent graduates to foster a sense of belonging and provide tangible pathways toward

degree completion [32], [33]. while also establishing dedicated reconciliation funds to finance the Indigenization of curriculum and the creation of centers for Indigenous community life on campus [34].

4. Discussion

Educators in IPEd schools operate within a multifaceted environment shaped by numerous issues and emerging trends. The commitment to culturally relevant education, as guided by the DepEd Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework, requires educators to adapt and contextualize the K to 12 curriculum to reflect the unique cultural backgrounds and knowledge systems of indigenous communities. This adaptation is crucial given the high number of indigenous languages and students in the Philippines.

The challenges extend beyond curriculum adaptation, encompassing the imperative to address existing educational disparities that indigenous learners often face. Furthermore, educators must adeptly navigate ongoing policy changes while simultaneously striving to bridge the digital divide, ensuring indigenous students have access to modern educational tools and resources.

Ultimately, the goal is to cultivate learning environments that are both equitable and empowering for indigenous learners. This necessitates a proactive approach involving the fostering of collaboration between schools and indigenous communities, promoting innovative pedagogical practices, and maintaining deep cultural respect. Embracing one's Filipino identity extends beyond birthplace, rooting instead in the embrace of culture and acknowledgment of self-worth. By committing to these principles, educators can significantly contribute to preserving and honoring the rich diversity and heritage of indigenous peoples in the Philippines. Success in this endeavor hinges on the State’s ability to resolve chronic operational deficiencies, such as the scarcity of specialized teaching materials and the lack of synergy among government agencies, which currently hinder the meaningful implementation of the IPED Framework [5]. Furthermore, addressing these bureaucratic hurdles requires a shift in teacher training to empower educators as agents of change who can distinguish the "funds of knowledge" indigenous students possess and integrate local practices—such as traditional music, agriculture, and medicinal lore—into core subjects like science and mathematics [35], [7], [6]. thereby enabling students to "walk in two worlds" by bridging the gap between modern school instruction and the ancestral realities of their homes [6]. This process of interface requires that administrators and teachers undergo a significant change in mindset to view indigenous worldviews as a co-equal dimension of the learning process rather than as mere supplementary content [5]. To achieve this parity, schools must actively involve organic resource persons from the communities in the crafting and modification of the curriculum to ensure it responds directly to the specific socio-cultural needs of the learners [36]. This collaborative development must prioritize the use of regional languages, such as Tausug, to ensure that instructional materials are not only linguistically accessible but also deeply relevant to the students' specific cultural traditions and daily lives [7]. Building such a bridge between formal education and local identity requires a rights-based approach that shifts away from assimilationist models toward an interface model of education, recognizing Indigenous peoples' sovereignty and their right to participate in national policy development [37]. This paradigm shift necessitates

continuous dialogue between the state and Indigenous communities to ensure that educational content is divided into the integral components of cognitive knowledge, moral conscience, and practical expression [37], [5]. ultimately empowering the Ayta and other groups to develop a sense of self-worth and dignity through the expansion of spaces for leadership and functional literacy [5].

Establishing mentorship programs that pair students with community elders or successful professionals from the same ethnic background can further solidify this connection, providing much-needed role models and career guidance within a supportive learning environment [7]. Additionally, the integration of need-based scholarship programs and financial aid is vital to alleviate the economic burdens that frequently impede consistent school attendance among marginalized tribal populations [7]. To sustain these academic gains, it is equally important to implement manpower development plans that guarantee employment opportunities within the ancestral domain upon graduation, thereby encouraging young professionals to reinvest their skills back into the village economy rather than seeking work elsewhere [38]. In addition to economic incentives, decentralized educational models should be paired with increased government funding to establish smaller, community-based schools in remote areas, thereby minimizing the physical barriers of geographic isolation [7]. Such decentralized schemes should prioritize the development of transportation solutions and the establishment of community learning centers to ensure that infrastructure and pedagogical materials meet the unique needs of indigenous learners [7], [39]. particularly by revising the Technology and Livelihood Education curriculum to emphasize experiential, home-based learning in fields like agriculture and entrepreneurship that align with the community's existing resources and traditional governance structures [38]. Implementing these comprehensive reforms further requires the establishment of cultural expression platforms, such as artistic workshops and digital storytelling, to amplify the voices of marginalized groups and counter the historical challenges of social exclusion [40]. This initiative should be bolstered by a commitment to personal empowerment, as seen in students who utilize their education as a form of vindication to challenge discriminatory treatment and prove their capacity for success [41]. To further reinforce this resilience, schools should organize regular community meetings and involve local volunteers to create a robust support system that celebrates cultural achievements alongside academic milestones [7]. Policy interventions should also focus on providing wrap-around support, such as weekly feeding programs and specialized safety training, to address the physical well-being and security of learners traveling from remote ancestral territories [42], [43]. Beyond physical security, the government must prioritize the construction of formal school facilities and the establishment of accreditation programs specifically for Indigenous Peoples' schools in these outlying areas to improve overall learning outcomes [1]. Strengthening these localized institutions also requires the development of region-specific interventions that align vocational programs with the demands of the local labor market, ensuring that certification outcomes lead directly to sustainable employment [44]. A place-sensitive approach is essential to this process, as it empowers regional authorities to determine which specific programs and instructional methods best serve the unique geographic and economic realities of their respective territories [45].

5. Conclusion

The exploration of issues and trends faced by educators in selected Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) schools in the Philippines reveals a multifaceted landscape of challenges and opportunities. Despite the Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015) aiming to contextualize the K to 12 Curriculum, significant hurdles persist. Key obstacles include the lack of adequate training for non-indigenous teachers in indigenous values and pedagogical methods, the marginalization of community elders from decision-making, and the profound scarcity of culturally contextualized learning materials.

Furthermore, educators grapple with physical accessibility barriers, limited inter-agency synergy, and the absence of specialized indigenous education in teacher training programs. Socio-cultural dynamics, such as traditional gender roles and financial constraints, frequently lead to high dropout rates and absenteeism. Language barriers, particularly the prevalence of Tagalog and the lack of mother-tongue materials beyond early grades, further alienate learners. The digital divide, coupled with a fundamental mismatch between classroom discipline and traditional socialization, exacerbates educational disparities. The exclusion of indigenous content from formal curricula often leads students to question their cultural heritage, reinforced by national policies favoring Filipino and English which marginalize native languages.

Addressing these systemic issues requires a paradigm shift towards a rights-based, interface model of education. This necessitates enhanced teacher training, active involvement of indigenous communities in curriculum development, and the creation of culturally relevant and linguistically accessible learning materials. Bridging the digital divide, fostering inter-agency collaboration, and establishing decentralized, community-based schools are crucial steps. Ultimately, the goal is to cultivate equitable and empowering learning environments that honor the rich diversity and heritage of indigenous peoples, enabling students to "walk in two worlds" while developing a strong sense of self-worth and dignity.

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