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Fear of Unemployment in Textile and Fashion Design Students: The Case of the University

Tekstil Ve Moda Tasarımı Öğrencilerinde İşsizlik Korkusu: Üniversite Örneği

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ABSTRACT

The textile industry is a key contributor to Turkey's economy, yet its labor-intensive structure has shifted to underdeveloped regions due to globalization. In such areas, it is often associated with cheap, insecure, and unregulated labor. Among textile graduates, the fear of unemployment-rather than job opportunity-is widespread. Similarly, the fashion industry struggles to adapt to evolving technological professions like AI and 3D design, as education remains rooted in traditional methods. This technological lag heightens anxiety about future employment among students in textile and fashion design programs. Unemployment is a persistent socio-economic issue that countries aim to minimize, not entirely solve. Therefore, identifying factors contributing to unemployment anxiety in this sector is crucial for developing effective social policies. This study examined 291 final-year university students to explore relationships between job expectations, work experience, and levels of state and trait anxiety. Results indicated significant correlations between job hope, experience, and anxiety levels.

Keywords: Textile and fashion industry, Unemployment anxiety, Employment, Job opportunities, Work experience.

ÖZ

Tekstil endüstrisi, Türkiye ekonomisine önemli katkı sağlayan bir sektördür, ancak küreselleşme nedeniyle emek yoğun yapısı, az gelişmiş bölgelere kaymıştır ve bu bölgelerde sektör genellikle ucuz, güvencesiz ve denetimsiz iş gücüyle özdeşleşmiştir. Tekstil mezunları arasında, iş bulma umudundan çok işsizlik korkusu yaygındır. Benzer şekilde, moda endüstrisi de eğitim sisteminin geleneksel yöntemlere dayalı olması nedeniyle yapay zeka ve 3D tasarım gibi gelişen teknolojik mesleklere uyum sağlamakta zorlanmaktadır. Bu teknolojik gecikme, tekstil ve moda tasarımı eğitimi alan öğrencilerde geleceğe yönelik istihdam kaygısını artırmaktadır. İşsizlik, ülkelerin tamamen çözmeyi değil, en aza indirmeyi amaçladığı kalıcı bir sosyo-ekonomik sorundur. Bu nedenle, sektörde işsizlik kaygısına neden olan etkenlerin belirlenmesi, etkili sosyal politikaların geliştirilmesi açısından kritik öneme sahiptir. Bu çalışma, 291 üniversite son sınıf öğrencisiyle yürütülmüş, iş beklentisi, iş deneyimi ile durumluk ve süreklilik kaygı düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkileri incelemiştir. Bulgular, iş umudu, deneyim ve kaygı düzeyleri arasında anlamlı ilişkiler olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Tekstil ve moda sektörü, İşsizlik kaygısı, İstihdam, İş bulma ümidi, İş deneyimi.*

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Introduction

The textile manufacturing industry has transformed its traditional production, which started in the early periods of history, into mass production with the industrial revolution and has become an indispensable branch of industry in the industrialization stages of countries. Today, with the support of technological developments, it continues to be an important industry branch for all countries with its wide variety and functional products. The mass production of textiles began with the industrial revolution. The textile industry, especially cotton weaving, has become synonymous with the British industrial revolution. In Hobsbawm's words (2008), cotton production was a typical by-product of international trade, and especially colonial trade, without which the Industrial Revolution could not be explained.

When the textile and ready-to-wear sectors are evaluated together, they are among the important sectors of Türkiye in terms of macro-economic dimensions such as gross domestic product, its share in the manufacturing industry and industrial production, exports, net foreign exchange inflow to the economy, employment and investment (Ticaret Bakanlığı İhracat Genel Müdürlüğü, 2024). The textile and ready-to-wear industry has made significant progress since the early 1970s, and it has taken its place among the rapidly growing sectors today due to the fact that the design and use of this sector according to personal tastes are decisive (Sanayi ve Teknoloji Bakanlığı, 2021). Indeed, as Amankwah et al. (2014) point out, in the 21st century, the textile and fashion industry has become an increasingly important component of industrial-based economies, and those who think that fashion is not a serious business have entered a period in which they need to be rethought.

In addition to the development and transformation of the industry, there are also many ongoing problems. In particular, the structure of the sector, the multiplicity of small-scale enterprises, the weakness of control mechanisms and the pressure of cheap production seem to be the main reasons for the spread of informality in the sector.

An increasing number of employees in the textile and apparel industry are employed without a formal employment contract/status. This is usually the case for home-based workers and those working in small workshops, but nowadays it has also spread to factories. There is a continuity between formal and informal work in the garment industry. In addition to registered employees in any workplace, there are also informal workers who do not have job security and do not receive regular or partial regular payments. This leads to increased insecurity for the employee and his family. At this point, the most common problems in the sector are:

- Precarious work
- Informality among salaried, wage and casual workers
- Home-based work
- It can be considered a day job.

The future of work in the textile and apparel sectors is changing profoundly and rapidly due to technological developments, climate change, demographic shifts, globalization, geopolitical and other drivers and megatrends (ILO, 2019). To support the sustainability of the textile and apparel industries, governments, employees and employers in many countries are increasing their investments in long-term strategies, including the formulation and implementation of national industrial policies for the sector. Anticipating skills needs and development tools can play an important role in preparing sectors for the future of work, promoting decent work and promoting the participation of millions of people (ILO, 2022; Kaya and Aytaç, 2023).

Although the sector adds economic value to the country with its export figures, it does not progress in the same line in terms of sectoral development. It is clear that there is no sustainable plan to combat informal employment or improve poor working conditions. At this point, when the audit data carried out by the ministry are examined, the workplaces where textile production is carried out are excluded from the planned inspection list, and the few workplaces that are inspected are audited upon complaint. Although there are laws that support the employee in terms of union struggle, workplaces that exceed these laws have always been tolerated

(Hisarlı and Demir, 2022). In connection with all these reasons, in addition to the unemployment in the sector, the future concerns and fears of graduates in this field are increasing day by day. The unemployment rate is one of the most critical indicators of the labor market and is an important indicator of the economic situation in general (Yüceol, 2005).

The problem of unemployment

Although the social and economic dimensions are different according to the countries, unemployment has been one of the most important problems of all societies throughout history. Especially in the changing technological and economic structures of the information age, unemployment is spreading rapidly in almost all societies with the globalization process; In terms of its causes and consequences, it constitutes one of the important social problems within the scope of socio-economic policies.

In today's world, the problem of unemployment is one of the priority problems for both developed and developing countries. Through employment policies, it is tried to find solutions to issues such as preventing unemployment, equal and fair income distribution and combating poverty (Sürücü, 2014). The unemployment rate is often a widely used indicator of the state of markets in a country, as well as an important measure of that country's overall economic situation (Byrne and Strobl, 2004). At the same time, the presence of unemployment in a society indicates a loss in that society's human capital (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010). In this direction, direct and indirect policies are implemented to reduce unemployment and prevent new unemployed, equip the unskilled labor force with the qualifications required by the age, and make labor markets function effectively (Bárcia de Mattos et al., 2022).

While the effects of technology on work have attracted attention in academia and other fields, these efforts have largely focused on the quantity of jobs and occupations, tasks, and skill profiles of employees (Tejani and Kucera, 2021; Kucera and Tejani, 2014).

The concepts of unemployment and employment should be used in the best way to make the best use of the labor force, which expresses the labor factor and is also one of the greatest sources of wealth of a society. Because the success of an economy is measured by whether it can provide jobs for everyone who wants to work for a valid wage. However, as countries meet new technologies day by day, production systems are changing and it is becoming difficult for the workforce to keep up with these developments. Providing employment opportunities for the growing workforce due to population growth is becoming a problem. The most important evidence of this is the current unemployment rates, the employment problem, and the fear. In this context, unemployment in general, and youth unemployment in particular are increasing in a significant part of the world's countries, and the employment rate continues to decline.

In Türkiye, on the other hand, youth unemployment may arise from the problems arising from the changes brought about by globalization and the age of technology in general, and the problems created by the labor market itself in particular. Youth unemployment, which has various reasons specific to the age group and depending on the structure of the labor market, creates a remarkable problem that is even higher than the unemployment rate experienced both in our country and in other countries. In particular, an effective link between the education system and the labor market cannot be established due to reasons such as the fact that the 15-24 age group is entering the labor market for the first time, have no previous work experience and is therefore not preferred by employers. This age group does not know the labor market sufficiently, and youth unemployment rates are twice the general unemployment rate.

According to the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank (FED), college graduates, defined as individuals with a college degree who are between 22 and 27 years old, are more likely to be unemployed than general employees. Statistics indicate that the unemployment rate for college graduates has steadily increased, while the overall unemployment rate for all other workers has declined rapidly over the past decade (Kelly, 2019).

The fact that youth unemployment is a problematic area in our country causes anxiety among young people before they can complete their education. Especially among university students, the concern that they will not be able to find a job after graduation leads to increased anxiety levels. This level of anxiety wears out young

people mentally. In fact, the anxiety of students entering the university starts before the exam, and there are many factors that affect their anxiety throughout their education life. During university education, many factors affect the concerns of students, from the city where the education is carried out to the socio-economic level, from the relations in the university environment to the housing problem. However, in the last years of school life, the most significant source of anxiety for university students is about the future and, consequently, about having a job, in other words, "unemployment anxiety" begins to emerge. The prevalence of unemployment, especially among young people and university graduates, may cause this level of anxiety to increase even more.

The main factors that lead textile and fashion design students to experience unemployment anxiety can be listed as follows:

1. *Mismatch between education and employment*: The education provided by textile and fashion design departments does not fully align with the industry's current needs. While graduates have theoretical knowledge, they may lack sufficient competence in applied production processes and technological proficiency.

2. *Market saturation and graduate surplus*: Every year, a large number of graduates complete textile and fashion programs. However, the industry does not generate enough new job positions to accommodate them all. When the supply of labor exceeds demand, unemployment becomes inevitable.

3. *Technological automation and digitalization*: With the widespread use of automation systems in textile production, the demand for skilled blue-collar workers and certain design positions is decreasing. The shift towards digital printing, 3D modelling, and AI-supported design is making it harder for graduates with traditional training to find employment.

4. *Low wages and poor working conditions in the sector*: The textile industry is generally known for low wage policies, long working hours, and job insecurity. Since graduates are reluctant to work under these conditions, the duration of their unemployment tends to increase.

5. *Weak culture of entrepreneurship and innovation*: Young people are not adequately supported or informed when it comes to building their own brands or starting entrepreneurial ventures. This leads to a graduate profile that is dependent solely on job seeking rather than job creation.

6. *Insufficient internship and work experience opportunities*: Due to a lack of cooperation between universities and the private sector, students do not have adequate access to internships or on-the-job training. As a result, they are often evaluated as "inexperienced" by employers upon graduation and are not hired.

7. *Exposure of the sector to global competition*: The Turkish textile industry is open to international markets and faces competition from countries with low-cost production. This restricts the employment of domestic labor, promotes outsourcing, and narrows job opportunities for young graduates.

8. *Regional employment imbalances*: Employment opportunities in the textile sector are heavily concentrated in certain cities (e.g., İstanbul, Bursa, Gaziantep, Denizli). Graduates are often compelled to seek jobs in these centers, increasing costs related to transportation, accommodation, and living, which makes the job search process more challenging.

9. *Gender-based employment perceptions*: The textile and fashion design sector is sometimes perceived as a "female-dominated" field, which may limit the employment opportunities of male graduates. This creates a specific unemployment risk for male graduates.

1**0**. *Lack of career guidance and psychosocial support*: Universities offer insufficient support for career planning and graduate follow-up. Young individuals lack awareness about where and how to find employment, which prolongs their unemployment periods.

University education is to prepare the personnel who will work in various sectors of the business world by passing them through basic training. However, the rapid increase in the number of graduates, with the increase in the number of universities, the growing recognition of the importance of self-education in a competitive employment market, and the unemployment problem in the country have led to young people being even more concerned about unemployment.

University is one of the most important periods in young people's lives. Their graduation is the beginning of business life or unemployment life. Job selection plans, friendships, fear of not being able to find a job and various responsibilities can be seen as some of the factors that cause anxiety in the person in order to take a role in real life (Çakmak and Hevedanlı, 2004). The main factors affecting university students' anxiety levels are their experiences of the labor market and their perceptions of unemployment and employment.

In this study, answers to the following questions were sought.

- In this process where the use of technology and artificial intelligence is developing, what is the level of unemployment anxiety of university seniors studying in the field of textile and fashion design?
- Is there a difference according to gender?
- What is the level of anxiety among those with work experience?

Material and Method

Material

The following tools were used in the study.

Personal information collection form: In the study, a personal information collection form consisting of questions such as faculty, department, gender, age, family income, academic success, employment anxiety, work experience was used.

Spielberger state-trait anxiety scale (STAI): The scale was developed by Spielberger et al. in 1964 to determine the state and trait anxiety levels of individuals. Turkish validity and reliability studies of the scale were conducted by Öner and Compte (1983). The state-trait anxiety inventory measures anxiety in adolescents and adults over the age of 14. The scale, which is a type of self-assessment, consists of 40 items consisting of short statements. The 20-item state anxiety scale and the 20-item trait anxiety scale are independent of each other.

Anxiety is the subjective fear that an individual feels due to the stressful situation they are in. When stress is intense, there is an increase in the level of state anxiety, and when the stress disappears, there is a decrease. Spielberger; state anxiety refers to the individual's temporary emotional reactions in events that are not constantly encountered, which occur because of the person's interpretation of special situations as threatening, related to their severity and duration, the amount of perceived threat and the continuity of the person's interpretation of the dangerous situation (Özusta, 1995). Trait Anxiety/Chronic Anxiety, is an individual's susceptibility to anxiety. The perception of the situation as stressful is the anxiety that arises from perceiving a normal situation as dangerous and threatening one's self-values (Öner and Compte, 1983).

The questionnaire form prepared by the researchers with the approval of the University Ethics Committee No. 8 dated 07.04.2025, was applied to the senior students in textile-related departments at a university during the 2024-2025 spring academic semester. The questionnaire was administered on a voluntary basis using the random sampling method. A total of 300 feedbacks were received from the questionnaires sent to the students. 11 of the questionnaires were excluded from the study because of the incomplete data, and the analyses were carried out on the remaining 291 questionnaires.

The research data were evaluated in the SPSS program. Frequency distributions, t-test and F-test were used to evaluate the data. During the evaluation of the data, the suitability of the normal distribution was investigated using the "Kolmogorov Smirnov Test", revealing that the data obtained from the state and trait anxiety scales matched the normal distribution ($p>0.05$).

Method

This study aims to determine the state and trait anxiety levels of university seniors studying in the field of textile and fashion design, as well as to determine the relationship between anxiety levels and variables such as job opportunities and job expectations, work experience, labor market expectations and anxiety levels.

Results

When the demographic information of the participants about gender, work experience and job opportunities was examined, it was understood that 50.5% were female (N= 147), 49.5% were male (N= 144), 26.5% had work experience (N= 177) and 60.8% (N= 114) had no work experience.

It is understood that more than half of the students participating in the study (N= 166) hope to find a job after graduation (57%). It is seen that 43% (N=124) are undecided about finding a job and are even pessimistic about it. In a study conducted on senior university students, it was determined that 50% of the students were afraid of being unemployed (Karaman, 2009). In a study conducted by Turgut et al. (2004), 72% of students' experience employment anxiety after graduation. In his study, Gizir (2005) found that 27% of senior students experienced anxiety about not being able to find a job. In the study conducted by Dursun and Aytaç (2009) on the senior students of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, it was seen that 17.5% of the students did not have hope of finding a job and experienced anxiety, and the reason for this was stated as the fact that most of the students (68%) had work experience. In the study conducted by Dursun and Aytaç (2012) with 275 students in order to determine the anxiety and hopelessness levels of the students studying in the last year of university and the hope of finding a job, it was determined that the hopelessness levels of those who did not think that they could find a job after graduation were higher and this difference was statistically significant. In their study of a total of 139 senior students studying at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Surat and Ceran (2020) concluded that 77.2% of the students "do not believe that they will find a job in a short time due to the uncertainty in the labor market". As can be seen in Table 1, the mean state anxiety of the participants was 46.16±10.35 and the mean of trait anxiety was 43.80±9.85.

Table 1. *Participants' status and trait anxiety averages*

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum value	Maximum value
State anxiety	46.16	10.35	20	72
Constant anxiety	43.80	9.85	20	69

When we investigated whether the anxiety levels of young people differed according to gender (Table 2), the state and trait anxiety scores of male students were found to be higher than female students, and this difference was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This finding coincides with similar studies (Akgün et al., 2007; Canbaz et al., 2007; Çakmak and Hevedanlı, 2004; Karaman, 2009). Different findings were also found in some studies conducted on university students and the anxiety levels of female students were found to be higher (Duman et al., 2009; Ghaderi et al., 2009; Şahin and Tuncel, 2008) In some studies, no significant difference was found in anxiety levels according to gender (Doğan and Çoban, 2009; Genç, 2008; Tümerdem, 2007; Üngören, 2007). In the study, it was also investigated whether there was a statistically significant difference between the state and trait anxiety levels between those who had hope of finding a job after graduation and those who had no hope of finding a job.

Table 2. *Independent group t-test of students' state and trait anxiety levels scores according to gender variable*

Scales	***Gender***							
	Woman			**Male**				
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	T-texts	**p**
State Anxiety	147	39.90	9.12	144	46.57	10.09	-3.901	**.000**
Constant Anxiety	147	39.84	6.93	144	44.37	8.08	-5.797	**.000**

As can be seen in Table 3, after this analysis, it is understood that both state and trait anxiety levels of those who are anxious about finding a job are higher than those who are not worried about finding a job. In other words, the mean trait anxiety scores of the students who had much anxiety in terms of finding a job after graduation were found to be higher than the others, and the difference between the trait anxiety mean scores of the students who did not have anxiety was found to be statistically significant ($p<0.05$). In similar studies conducted on university students, it has been found that those who are pessimistic about finding a job experience more anxiety (Balkaya, 2017; Dursun and Aytaç, 2009; Dursun and Aytaç, 2012; Doğan and Çoban, 2009; Ersoy-Kart and Erdost 2008; Karaman, 2009; Koçak and Çepni 2017; Sürat and Ceren, 2020).

Table 3. *Independent group t-test results of students' state and trait anxiety levels scores according to job expectations*

Scales	***Possibility of finding a job***							
	Yes			**No**				
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	T-texts	**p**
State Anxiety	176	38.75	9.27	115	40.09	10.09	-4.040	**.000**
Constant Anxiety	176	36.78	8.08	115	41.48	9.08	-4.255	**.000**

When it was examined whether there was a difference between state and trait anxiety and whether the participants had any work experience, the state anxiety and trait anxiety levels of the students with work experience were found to be lower than the anxiety levels of the students without work experience (Table 4). However, this difference was not significant in terms of state anxiety levels ($p>0.05$), but it was found to be significant in terms of trait anxiety levels ($p<0.05$).

Table 4. *Independent group t-test results of students' state and trait anxiety levels scores according to their work experience*

Anxiety Variable	***Work experience***							
	Yes			**No**				
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	T-texts	**p**
State Anxiety	177	40.29	10.12	114	42.56	10.69	-.989	**.435**
Constant Anxiety	177	40.24	8.23	114	43.57	8.98	-2.726	**.013**

Conclusion

Unemployment, underemployment, and the inability to create sufficient jobs are among the most important problems of developed and developing countries. In order to make and implement policies that will help reduce unemployment and increase employment, it is necessary to know the open jobs and the qualifications of the unemployed. Otherwise, the policies to be put forward will not be sufficient. For this reason, as Yıldız (2014) points out, it is very important to know the ratio of each type of unemployment in total unemployment as well as to know the general unemployment level.

To comprehend all aspects of unemployment, which have individual, psychological, family, social and many other effects, it is necessary to know the causes of unemployment, the course of its types in the historical process, and the concepts and terms related to unemployment (Solak, 2012). In addition, there is a need to examine the unemployment levels of young people and other age groups in various aspects such as education, marital status, living spaces separately and to provide sectoral information. In addition to these, all kinds of technical analysis should be made to help solve the problem, and necessary solutions should be put into practice in line with the results. Thus, the problems caused by unemployment and their levels will be determined, and accordingly, effective measures and necessary policies will be implemented to combat unemployment.

Unemployment is a major problem faced by graduates not only in the fields of textile and fashion design, but also in every field. For this reason, unemployment or fear of unemployment is an extremely important problem (Alsubyani, 2016). Youth unemployment is an even more important problem area. Considering the importance of the problem, it is understood that despite the employment and economic policies implemented in the past, the unemployment problem and the fear of the young population could not be prevented, the studies carried out against this threat for the future did not yield results, and new solutions to the problem of youth unemployment should be introduced.

Unemployment in general and youth unemployment in particular is not only a national problem, but also an international one. Unemployment is not only an important economic problem, but also a very serious phenomenon that deeply affects all segments of society and brings social problems with it (Bayraktar and İncekara, 2013). Therefore, unemployment rates need to be brought down.

The biggest reason for structural unemployment in Türkiye is the high youth unemployment rate. One of the reasons for the high youth unemployment rate is that qualified people have difficulties in transitioning from school life to business life. This situation is an indication of how weak the education-employment relationship is in Türkiye. In this respect, harmonization of the textile-fashion sector and education policies, the creation of policies in line with the realities of the country and the needs of society in both areas, and a planning that considers the future shape of the sector based on current trends are seen as a necessity in solving the problems (Kaya, 2011). However, to reduce unemployment, the contribution of economic growth to employment should be taken into consideration, rigidities in the labor market should be eliminated for employment-friendly growth, employment taxes should be reduced, incentives and supports should be provided to businesses that create employment, and most importantly, sectoral priorities should be considered by strengthening the education-employment relationship.

Although the number of college-educated people has increased dramatically, employment opportunities are shrinking. So much so that it is possible to come across young people who cannot find a job for a few years after graduation. The most important factor studying in the last year of university is the anxiety about the future and finding a job. The prevalence of unemployment in Türkiye, especially among young people and the educated workforce, causes this anxiety and hopelessness to increase even more, and unemployment is considered a mistake and a defect that is a source of incompetence or shame.

In this study, which was carried out with the participation of senior students of textile and fashion design departments, the characteristics and state anxiety and hopelessness levels of the students who did not have hope of finding a job after graduation were found to be higher than those who had hope of finding a job. In the comparisons made in terms of gender, the anxiety and hopelessness levels of male students were found to be higher than female students. However, in some studies, it has been observed that boys' anxiety levels are higher than girls. An important reason for this difference may be due to the fact that the field of textile and fashion is considered as a field of women's employment.

One of the most important findings of this research is that students with work experience in the labor market, even for a short period of time, have lower anxiety levels. The fact that students gain work experience through internships or short-term or full-time studies during the education process causes the perception that these experiences will facilitate their employment and therefore they will adapt easily, and this perception positively affects the general mental health of the students.

Undoubtedly, the threat of unemployment has become a part of life for the employees of industrialized countries, and unfortunately, the whitewashing of this process in the eyes of society has not yet been fully realized. The need to protect and support young individuals waiting to be employed through both social policies and society has emerged dramatically. Especially in our country, where young, qualified manpower is increasingly unemployed, it is necessary to address this issue and produce social policies for the solution of the problem.

In conclusion, the issue of unemployment among graduates in the field of textiles stems from multidimensional factors at structural, sectoral, and individual levels. Addressing this problem requires comprehensive social policies that strengthen the alignment between education and employment, promote entrepreneurship,

expand internship and work experience opportunities, reduce regional inequalities, and enhance career guidance services. Furthermore, it is essential to implement support mechanisms that challenge gender-based employment perceptions and improve the psychosocial well-being of young people. These holistic approaches to reducing youth unemployment play a crucial role not only at the individual level but also in ensuring societal welfare and economic sustainability.

The study has some limitations. Firstly, this research was carried out in the departments of a university that provide education related to textiles. The results obtained are limited only to these universities and departments. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize. In this regard, it is recommended to carry out studies in different universities and different faculties in the future.

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