

Article

Faculty Support as Part of Faculty Strategy on the Academic Motivation of the Working Students

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Abstract: Working students are an important and diverse category within today's higher education institutions. Part of the strategies necessary for the academic motivation of working students and implicitly the increase of their performance concerns a series of strategies that involve individual, institutional and structural factors. This study investigates the relationship between working students' perceptions of faculty support and their overall level of academic motivation (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation or amotivation) grounded in self-determination theory. The findings indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between faculty support and the overall level of students' academic motivation. At the same time, the results show that both psychological and functional support, as indicators of faculty support, have strong relationships with different types of academic motivation. In this sense, our results indicate that faculty support for working students has a strong positive relationship with students' intrinsic academic motivation and respectively a weaker relationship with academic amotivation. These results show that any policy or strategy adopted by faculty decision-makers to help working students improve their academic motivation (performance) must include the provision of support on different dimensions (social, psychological and functional).

Keywords: working students; self-determinations theory; types of academic motivation; faculty support; academic motivation survey



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1. Introduction

Understanding academic motivation and the antecedents of the educational motivational process are necessary for identification and implementation of different actions that would contribute to the increase of students' academic performances [1]. Due to the fact that working students have a dual role (that of student but also of employee), they need more guidance and support in terms of their personal and academic development, and this requires, among other things, a significant involvement of universities/faculties in the learning environment of students, providing the necessary support leading to better academic motivation and a high level of engagement in learning. The importance of teacher support in the academic success of students, and by extension working students, plays an important role in promoting student learning, with a major impact on student academic performance [1,2].

Related to the academic motivation of working students, two major aspects should be taken into account: (1) the general level of the students' academic motivation (the level of motivation intensity) and (2) the types (forms) of the students' academic motivations. In this sense, academic motivation must be analyzed from a differentiated multidimensional perspective because both the general level of motivation (as a component) and the different types of motivations could also influence the student's learning activity and subsequently their academic performance.

The aim of this study is to analyze the perceptions of working students regarding the influence of faculty support on their academic motivation. More precisely the study

investigates to what extent faculty support influences not only the general level of academic motivation among working students, but also the various types of academic motivation. Furthermore, based on the results, we argue that any educational strategy adopted by decision makers at the college level needs to include actions to support students to improve their academic performance and ensure better educational outcomes. This support should include social, psychological and functional support [3].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Working Students

One of the increasingly numerous categories that universities are facing are working students. This category, compared to other categories of students, have a certain specificity (characteristic) which is highlighted by the attempt to manage and reconcile at least two roles they have assumed, namely the role of employee in an organization and the role of student [3]. Nowadays more and more students are starting to take on more roles, and it is not just about the status and role of student. This is not only a necessity for many students, but also a common phenomenon among students (especially those at the Master's level). In this sense, some students, in addition to the role of student, also take on the role of parent, or the role of support and social advocate for family members, and last but not least the role of employee [3]. Because of this multiple status, i.e., the assumption of different roles in addition to the student role, the category of working students becomes vulnerable to a number of problems and risks especially those related to work-school balance or related to role conflict (student role and employee role). Moreover, the high level of dropout among working students [4–6] may be a consequence of the vulnerabilities they face. When one of the roles requires high amounts of energy, working students have to make sacrifices at the expense of the other role (e.g., a high level of energy put into work may mean sacrificing time for academic preparation), which will ultimately negatively damage the work-school balance or generate a high level of work-school conflict [7]. In this respect, a number of studies have shown that working students face a challenge related to the need to balance their multiple roles (role conflict) [8,9] but also a number of problems related to stress and burnout [10–12] reduced academic achievement and performance [13–15] or addictive behavior problems [16–18].

While some of the studies have focused on highlighting vulnerabilities and analyzing problems faced by working students, other research has focused on highlighting the positive aspects of being a student employee. In this regard, a study conducted on working undergraduate students in Turkey showed that the majority of them were satisfied with working and studying at the same time [19].

Working students' motivation are provided by the necessity to earn a living and to obtain new skills required at their present workplace or a new one [20]. In this sense intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have the same role for working students in order to obtain their necessities.

Studies regarding working students in Europe [21,22] shows that employment related to the field of study has positive effects on employability, and that work complements the formal educational process (leads to better development of students' skills and knowledge). At the same time, other studies, have shown that students who work while learning are likely to have more benefits when working in jobs related to their field of study [22,23].

Because of the vulnerabilities they face, working students can benefit from different types of support which can aid their academic motivation. We discuss those different types of support next.

2.2. Faculty Support

Faculty support takes many forms and depends on the institution's ability to understand the needs and desires of the students, the amounts and types of resources that the institution has, and also its willingness to allocate for support [24]. In terms of activities, a large part of the faculty support is oriented toward the development of a student-faculty

relationship based on respect, courtesy, accessibility, and empathy and on promoting processes and activities that may help and guide students in the field of personal and academic development [24].

In fact, faculty support can be defined as the support resulting from teacher-student interactions [25]. Thus, the support of the faculty can be materialized through a series of counseling activities, especially psychological counseling, and personal development, tutoring and academic development activities, support and social support activities, actions for faster integration of students and finally the organization of various recreational or socializing activities. Therefore, the range of support activities is extremely varied, and it is not limited to the main learning activities but should also cover different interrelated educational activities.

The faculty support provided to students can be considered one of the aspects that is associated not only with the level of students' academic performance but also the process and level of school dropout. From another point of view, low support activities, could have a negative impact on the attrition rate. According to Pavelea and Moldovan [26] the attrition rate is one of the most important indicators for university systems, because the funding and financing of higher-education institutions is correlated with the number of students enrolled. In this sense the decision makers must include in their educational strategy a suitable level of support for maintaining or increasing the attrition rate. Einhellig [27] considers that both financial support and emotional support from supervisors and management encourages students' academic success. Several studies [27–29] have found that both appropriate and constructive feedback (as a form of support and encouragement for students) and autonomy-supportive teaching, influence the persistence and students' motivation.

Supports should not be limited to providing certain activities of relaxation, fun or socialization but involves a series of complex processes and activities aimed at achieving high levels of personal and academic development by students. From another point of view, support predicts both students' academic performance and involvement. In this regard, Wilson [1] showed that faculty support is positively and significantly correlated with all forms of student engagement. In other research, faculty support appears to mediate the relationship between student effort and satisfaction [30]. From the perspective of student-faculty interaction that includes educational and extra-curriculum activities, it is confirmed that there are several specific types of student-faculty interactions that can be seen as predictors of student performance and academic success [31].

Also, Henderson [32] and Daumiller [33] indicates that the way in which faculties are concerned about their students along with setting a propitious learning environment influences both students' intention to graduate and their level of learning motivation. The reinforcement and faculty social support were also positively associated with the level of students' academic results [34]. At the same time, a better understanding of students' needs and preferences by the faculty (or university) is related to enhanced student satisfaction regarding courses and better attitudes toward learning [35].

Finally, Holland et al. [24] shows that the development of a wide range of support strategies for students, including academic support, pastoral support (social orientation) and employability counseling encourages learning and contributes to improving academic performance.

Faculty support needs to take into account academic motivation, and in order to see how this relationship aids working students we discuss different types of academic motivation in the next section.

2.3. Academic Motivation

While motivation as a concept involves a multitude of definitions, academic motivation implies a more specific definition, and it is related not only to those aspects that determine a more enthusiastic school attendance but also an increased engagement in someone's own learning process and academic development [36]. It is important to examine the factors

that can influence students' academic performance in order to identify the low academic performances that can have a negative effect on the number of students who graduate.

If we take into consideration that the number of students graduating (relative to the number of enrolled students) is, for many universities, a quality and performance indicator, we could argue that students' academic performance is one of the factors that influence the quality indicator of the university systems. That's why, in our opinion, the educational strategies must concern very seriously students' academic motivation.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is one of the most common approaches regarding academic motivation. For Deci and Ryan [37] self-determination is a capacity but also a need, underlining the importance of three basic human needs in intrinsic motivation—autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Self-determination theory focuses on the relationship between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic factors that may increase or decrease intrinsic motivation [37]. For example, in education, teachers may channel the intrinsic motivation of students toward the promotion of learning using extrinsic factors (learning climate, the use of rewards or punishments, supportive teachers' behavior, trusting interpersonal context etc.).

Academic motivation may be one of the most important psychological aspects that influence the learning and personal development of students [38]. While some studies identify academic motivation as one among other significant factors that are positively associated with student performance [38,39], other studies consider motivation the only factor that has a direct impact on academic achievement; the rest of the factors influencing the students' performances are achieved through motivation [40].

According to self-determination theory, applied in the academic field, three forms of academic motivation can be distinguished: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and non-motivation (amotivation); these types of motivation are located on a continuum, and reflect the extent to which the behavior voluntarily adopted by an individual is in accordance with their own interests [41]. In Figure 1 we can see the connection Ryan and Deci [42] made between autonomous, controlled, different types of motivation (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation or amotivation) and regulatory styles which refers to the four types of extrinsic motivations [42]. Amotivation reflects the lowest degree of autonomy, amotivated individuals lack the intention to act, while motivated behavior may take various forms depending on the level of autonomy [42]. For example, the least autonomous behavior is externally regulated (an individual behavior is oriented toward external demands) and if individuals internalize regulations their autonomy will increase.

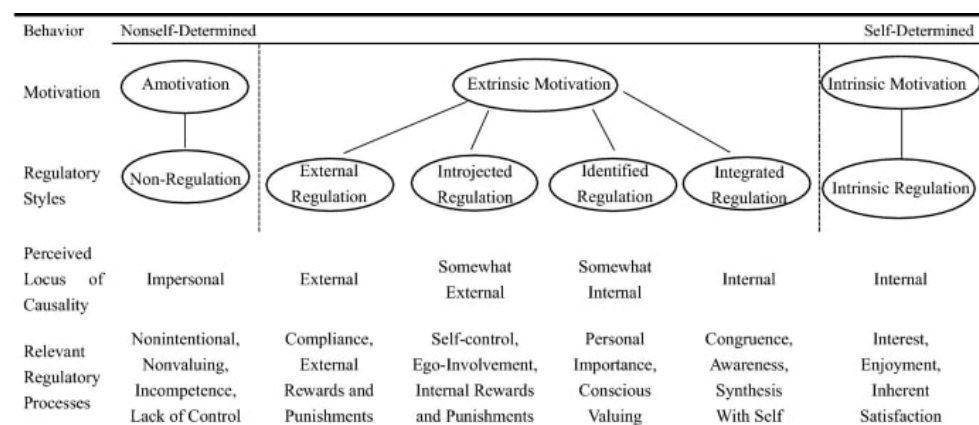


Figure 1. Types of motivation and regulatory styles. Source: Ryan and Deci [42].

Certain types of motivations (e.g., autonomous motivation) positively influence academic outcomes [43–46] and confirms that academic motivation is one of the factors that influence a person's success or failure in the learning process [47–49]. Also, academic motivation was associated both with the mental health features of students [50] and the attitude with the learning process [51]. Regarding academic motivations it is showed [52] that

some of extrinsic motivation types (extrinsic motivation—external regulation and extrinsic motivation—identified regulation) are important dimensions of academic motivation.

At the same time, some other studies confirmed that, overall, students are motivated by extrinsic motivation [31,53] suggesting the importance of examination grades among other factors. Extrinsic motivation seems to be more likely to experience for working students as they need to manage a workplace environment and an educational academic process in the same time [23,54]. Due to undergoing time constraints working students tend to need more external rewards in order to be fully motivated and perform on both sides (academic and workplace).

While some research focuses on the role and importance of academic motivation, other studies analyzed factors that influence the process of academic motivation. In this regard, Ryan and Deci [42] identified two clusters of factors that influence academic motivation: internal factors (or student beliefs) related to student characteristics (like social class, expectations), and external factors related to social factors (family members), academic related factors (courses, assignments, examination, feedback) or environment.

Academic motivation and faculty support will be the main concepts in a quantitative study that will be discussed next.

2.4. Methodology

In this study we investigate the extent to which faculty support influences the overall level of motivation and different types of academic motivation. For evaluating the level of academic motivation, we used Academic Motivation Scale—AMS [55] often applied to measure motivation according to SDT. Although we used all 28 items from the original instrument, we operated a series of changes and adjustments to fit the questionnaire as well as possible to the context and specificity of the master program offered by Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences (FSPAC) and Faculty of Sociology and Social Work (FSAS), both faculties being part of Babes-Bolyai University Cluj (Romania)—see Supplementary Materials.

We applied AMS because of its multidimensional approach in academic context [56,57]. On the other hand, AMS has, from the point of view of psychometric properties, a high level of reliability and validity [55,58]. AMS aims the evaluation of academic motivation on 7 subscales: 3 types of intrinsic motivation (intrinsic motivation related to knowledge, achievements, and stimulation), 3 types of extrinsic motivation (identified, introjected, external motivation) and amotivation.

For analysing the support level of the faculty, we used the Shelton Perceived Faculty Support Scale (SPFSS). In this sense, the perception of the support provided by the faculty were measured on two dimensions [59]: (1) psychological support (involving the encouragement, support, and promotion of a sense of competence among students); (2) functional support activities that help students to complete different tasks and achieve their proposed objectives).

Analyses were conducted via SPSS 25, reliability of each subscale is confirm by the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of internal consistency reliability, which is 0.933 in the case of Shelton's support scale, and 0.842 for academic motivation scale.

To test the relationship between faculty support (on the 2 dimensions) and the different types of academic motivations, we used 2 methods of statistical analysis, namely: (1) a statistical correlation analysis; (2) multiple regression statistical analysis. Moreover, through these analyzes we wanted to predict not only the relationship between support and academic motivation, but also the level of impact that the 2 dimensions of support (both psychological and functional support) have on the types of academic motivation.

At the survey participated 137 working students enrolled in FSPAC's and FSAS's master programs at the Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, from a total of 160 students that attendant these programs. Masters students have been chosen for this study because they have specific characteristics (many responsibilities, more academic experience and work engagement) which make them different from undergraduate students [20].

The response rate was 85%. The demographics of students is 60% female and 40% males, from the total survey population, with more than 90% representing working students. Ethical aspects include voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, potential for harm, results communication for each participant in the study. Due to the large number of working master students, the courses are organized on Monday to Friday afternoons (from 16:30 to 20:10), to give them the possibility to work and come to school.

Most respondents were in the final year of the master program (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the surveyed population.

Year of Study	No. of Students (%)
Year 1	56 (40.9)
Year 2	81 (59.1)
Total	137 (100)

3. Results

In analyzing the relationship between the faculty support and the level of academic motivation we used statistical correlation analysis, and the results (Table 2) show two major aspects. First, the results confirm that there is a statistically significant relationship between the overall level of academic motivation and faculty support, although the correlation is rather moderate than strong. Second, psychological support, as a dimension of faculty support, seems to have a strong relationship with the overall level of academic motivation compared to functional support dimension.

Table 2. Relationship between faculty support on different types of academic motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) and the overall level of academic motivation (statistical correlation analysis).

		Psychological Support	Functional Support	Overall Level of Academic Motivation
AMOT	Pearson Correlation	−0.574 **	−0.154	
- Amotivation	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.098	
	N	137	137	
EMER	Pearson Correlation	0.096	0.089	
- Extrinsic motivation, external regulation	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.302	0.342	
	N	137	137	
EMIN	Pearson Correlation	0.148	0.297 *	
- Extrinsic motivation, introjected regulation	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.110	0.033	
	N	137	137	
EMID	Pearson Correlation	0.169	0.294 *	
- Extrinsic motivation, identified regulation	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.069	0.025	
	N	137	137	
IMTA	Pearson Correlation	0.090	0.259	
- Intrinsic motivation to accomplish	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.332	0.086	
	N	137	137	
IMTK	Pearson Correlation	0.607 **	0.216 **	
- Intrinsic motivation to know	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.001	
	N	137	137	
IMTS	Pearson Correlation	0.648 *	0.283 **	
- Intrinsic motivation to stimulate	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.025	0.001	
	N	137	137	
Functional Support	Pearson Correlation			0.608 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.001
	N			137
Psychological Support	Pearson Correlation			0.765 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.000
	N			137

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results confirm that faculty support, viewed from both functional and psychological perspective, has a different influence on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In this sense, functional support tends to indicate a strong relationship with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, compared to psychological support.

Faculty support has a weak relationship with amotivation from the psychological support dimension. Thus, given that academic amotivation (AMOT) represent the lack of students' motivation in learning engagement, one method for reducing this form of academic motivation is to provide psychological support to them. Obviously, offering only the psychological support may not help too much in decreasing academic amotivation among students if it is not supplemented by other measures.

Second, regarding academic extrinsic motivation, faculty support has a weak relationship; only functional support seems to have a moderate relationship with certain types of extrinsic motivations. In this sense, the findings confirm that there is a relationship only between functional support and some forms of extrinsic motivation: (1) extrinsic motivation—introjected regulation (EMIN); and (2) extrinsic motivation—identified regulation (EMID). Although the relationship is statistically significant, the correlation between them is weak.

Thirdly, both psychological and functional support had a strong relationship with different forms of intrinsic motivation. However, compared to functional support, psychological support has a strong relationship. In this regard, the results of this study indicate that faculty support is more related with intrinsic academic motivation, compared with extrinsic motivation, and can be seen as a factor that has a positively relationship with different forms of academic motivation. Indeed, a series of forms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (IMTK—intrinsic motivation to know; IMTS—intrinsic motivation to stimulate) have a direct and statistically significant relationship with functional support, although the correlation is moderate. At the same time, we could observe that intrinsic motivation to accomplish (IMTA) is not strongly related to any of the two dimensions of the faculty support.

Instead, the multiple regression statistical analysis (Table 3) highlights the fact that the only factor that predicts the overall level of motivation is the one related to psychological support. According to the multiple regression model, only psychological support has a statistically significant influence.

Table 3. Multiple regression regarding faculty support (functional and psychological) and different factors (motivational and amotivational).

Factors			Estimate	S.E	95% CI		<i>p</i>
					LL	UL	
Overall Level of Academic Motivation			0.130	0.271	0.058	0.205	0.000
Amotivation	0.110	0.164	0.039	0.187	0.058	0.205	0.000
EMER	0.009	0.531	0.030	0.071	0.039	0.187	0.339
EMIN	0.042	0.592	−0.072	−0.004	0.030	0.071	0.007
EMID	0.038	0.369	0.069	0.120	−0.072	−0.004	0.012
IMTA	0.037	0.479	−0.074	−0.004	0.069	0.120	0.013
IMTK	0.272	0.450	0.098	0.287	−0.074	−0.004	0.000
IMTS	0.260	0.547	0.092	0.254	0.098	0.287	0.002

Related to the amotivation dimension, the results of the multiple regression analysis confirm that psychological support has a significant impact, compared to functional support.

Regarding the types of extrinsic motivations, the multiple regression statistical analysis confirms the fact that faculty support (from the perspective of psychological support and functional support) determines to a small extent these types of motivation. Only functional support seems to predict EMIN (extrinsic motivation, introjected regulation).

The multiple regression regarding the types of intrinsic motivations, confirms, from a certain point of view, the results of the correlation analysis. Thus, on the one hand, the results highlight the fact that both psychological support and functional support predict the types of intrinsic academic motivations. On the other hand, the results seem to highlight that psychological support, compared to functional support, has a greater level of explanation.

4. Discussion

Any approach to academic success of working students requires analysis and consideration of their academic motivation. In fact, the causal chain between motivating factors and student performance is understandable. In the present study, we were interested in investigating the perception of working students (at master's level) related to the impact of faculty support on academic motivation. While previous research has explored issues related to the vulnerabilities they face particularly in relation to work-school balance/work-school conflict, the role and importance of faculty support on academic motivation has been less explored. Based on self-determination theory, a relationship between academic motivation and faculty support is suggested by findings of this study. The results confirm that there is a direct and positive correlation between working students' perception of faculty support (described on two levels: psychological support and functional support) and the overall level of academic motivation.

At the same time, results confirm that faculty support is associated differently with forms (types) of academic motivation. More specifically, the psychological support leads to a decrease of amotivation. Considering that amotivation could be defined as the absence of motivation and could be linked with a series of negative academic consequences (poor academic performance, higher incidence of problem behaviors, low academic self-esteem, intention to school dropout), faculty support can be viewed as a practical solution for preventing these, by promoting in particular psychological support.

In addition, the study confirms that faculty support has different relationships on intrinsic and extrinsic academic motivation. In this sense; it seems that a strong relationship with faculty support is on intrinsic forms of academic motivation rather than psychological support. In contrast, extrinsic motivation has a strong relationship with functional support and weaker with psychological support.

Different types of support (psychological and functional) are associated with academic motivation and have a particular role in obtaining academic performance for working students. In this sense, psychological support increases the level of personally rewarding aspects of working students by identifying the elements that makes the academic education process more interesting and enjoyable. Teachers can provide guidelines in a way that students can complete a task, simply because there are willing to participate and enjoy the academic process. Functional support is more oriented to external rewards, namely to the benefits that working students will obtain if they complete tasks and obtain positive academic results. In this regard, working students are more oriented to obtain certain facilities from the faculty in order to have a high level of motivation, and also are looking forward to their professional career as functional support is associated with extrinsic aspects.

From the perspective of the results, psychological support can be considered a factor that determinates the student to be motivated to carry out various tasks and academic activities. The pleasure to obtain new skills, information, is stimulated, respectively the pleasure for being involved in fun and excitement activities, are positive (stimulating) sensations for motivation. From this point of view, it is justified that any college-level strategy regarding working students should include activities and measures oriented to psychological support.

Therefore, whether we are talking about psychological or functional support from faculty for working students, this support remains a valuable solution to one of the most acute problems related to students' academic motivation—low levels of academic motivation. The Self-Determination Theory can be used to explain the results of this study because it

indicated how working students' decisions are associated with intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, namely how academic educational actors can use psychological support for increasing students' interest and enjoyable in the educational process, or functional support in order to provide external rewards, both with the purpose for increasing academic motivation and performance.

Limitations of research include collecting cross-sectional data, the particular educational context in which the data was collected (COVID-19 restrictions, class attendance of working students') and also related to participants and generalizations (because the present study has included Romanian working students, it is recommended that the AMS to be employed in other country with different educational culture).

Regarding limitation, the statistical models of multiple regressions have a rather small degree of explanation (small value of R Square) which requires a more complex approach based on complex statistical models of the SEM type (Structural Equation Modeling). A bigger sample could reflect different results on analysis, and could change the results of relationship between different factors that address faculty support.

5. Conclusions

Students themselves, educational institutions and even employers can contribute to achieving a work-study-life balance for working students. It is important that the faculties, as forms of the higher education system, are aware of the vulnerabilities and dangers to which working students are exposed and to develop a series of activities, within the educational strategies, aimed at reducing these dangers. In that sense, support strategies for working students and the quality of support they receive from faculties can play a role in helping students to better manage their two roles (that of student and that of employee).

According to the results: the strategy of the faculties with working students should not be limited to a certain type of support (for example the functional one), but should be based on a multidimensional perspective. Concretely, along with offering various forms of functional support (for example scholarships, access to various educational services) faculties must also be involved in providing various forms of psychological support (for example access to psychological counseling, various discussions between students who teachers also work on their encouragement).

In summary, college working students, given the vulnerabilities they face, need more attention from colleges/universities. Our results show that the inclusion of faculty support (both functional and psychological support) in the educational strategy are elements that have a strong and positive relationship with academic motivation.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/educsci14070746/s1>.

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