SpineSense: IoT-Based Wearable Device for Real-Time Posture Monitoring and Correction

[1]Saifee Humaira, [2]Jha Saakshi, [3]Khan Zaara, [3]Shukla Anshika

[5]**Guide: Prof. Shahjahan Shaikh**

[1234]Department of Computer Engineering
[1234]Rizvi College of Engineering, Bandra, Mumbai, India
[1]humairasaifee@eng.rizvi.edu.in, [2]jhasakshi18@eng.rizvi.edu.in, [3]zaarakhn07@eng.rizvi.edu.in, [3]shuklaanshika@eng.rizvi.edu.in

Abstract—**Prolonged poor posture among students and office workers has emerged as a significant health concern, contributing to chronic musculoskeletal disorders affecting the back, neck, and spine. With individuals spending 6–10 hours daily in seated positions, there is an urgent need for real-time feedback mechanisms to enable proactive postural correction. This paper presents SpineSense, a novel IoT-based wearable system designed to continuously monitor spinal alignment and provide instant haptic feedback for posture correction. The system integrates an MPU-6050 6-axis Inertial Measurement Unit (IMU) and flex sensors to capture comprehensive spinal orientation and curvature data. An ESP32 microcontroller processes sensor data in real-time using a complementary filter algorithm and triggers a vibration motor when sustained postural deviation is detected. The device achieves 92.4% posture detection accuracy across multiple test scenarios and provides full-day operation with a 3.7V 2000mAh LiPo battery. Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) connectivity enables data transmission to a companion mobile application for trend analysis and daily posture scoring. With a Bill of Materials (BOM) cost under ₹1200 ($15 USD), SpineSense offers an affordable, non-invasive solution for proactive spinal health management, addressing critical gaps in existing commercial systems.**

Index Terms—**Posture Monitoring, IoT Wearable, Spinal Health, MPU-6050 IMU, ESP32, Haptic Feedback, Musculoskeletal Disorders, BLE, Real-time Processing**

I. Introduction

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) represent the leading cause of disability worldwide, with poor spinal posture identified as a primary preventable contributing factor. According to the World Health Organization (2021), over 80% of the global population will experience back pain at some point in their lives, with postural deviations being a significant driver of early-onset spinal conditions including kyphosis, lordosis, and chronic disc herniation. The global shift toward remote work and online education has dramatically increased the average daily time spent in seated positions, exacerbating this public health challenge.

Current solutions for posture monitoring fall into two categories: expensive clinical-grade equipment used in medical settings, and smartphone applications that rely on manual logging and lack continuous passive monitoring capability. Commercial wearable devices such as Lumo Lift and UpRight Go, while offering vibration feedback, typically cost $60–$150 USD and rely solely on accelerometer data, missing critical information about spinal curvature and multi-plane deviations.

This research addresses these limitations by developing SpineSense, a low-cost IoT-enabled wearable that combines IMU sensor fusion with flex sensor technology to provide comprehensive spinal posture monitoring. The system delivers real-time haptic correction feedback and transmits detailed posture analytics to a mobile application, enabling users to proactively manage their spinal health at a fraction of the cost of existing solutions.

A. Motivation and Problem Statement

Early-stage postural deviations are often painless but accumulate over time, leading to severe conditions that require extensive medical intervention. Students and desk workers aged 15–45, who spend 5+ hours daily in seated positions, face particular risk. However, existing monitoring solutions present several challenges:

- High cost barriers limiting accessibility for student and low-income demographics
- Lack of real-time correction mechanisms—most systems log data retrospectively
- Single-axis detection missing lateral and torsional spinal deviations
- Dependency on smartphone connectivity for feedback functionality

SpineSense addresses these gaps through an integrated hardware-software solution that provides continuous, autonomous posture monitoring with immediate corrective feedback, all at a development cost accessible to the target demographic.

B. Scope and Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

- Design and develop a lightweight wearable device for continuous spinal posture monitoring using IMU and flex sensor fusion
- Implement real-time haptic feedback mechanisms with configurable sensitivity thresholds
- Achieve posture detection accuracy of 90% or above through sensor calibration and algorithm optimization
- Develop a BLE-connected mobile application for posture trend analysis and scoring
- Ensure all-day battery operation (8+ hours) with safe lithium battery management
- Maintain total Bill of Materials cost under ₹1200 ($15 USD)

The system targets individuals who spend extended periods in seated positions, focusing on detection of sagittal and coronal plane deviations in the upper back and thoracic spine region.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Posture monitoring technology has evolved significantly over the past decade, with various approaches proposed for detecting and correcting postural deviations. This section reviews existing systems, identifies their limitations, and positions SpineSense within the current research landscape.

A. IMU-Based Posture Monitoring Systems

Dempsey et al. (2021) provided a comprehensive review of wearable inertial sensor systems for lower limb exercise and rehabilitation, demonstrating the effectiveness of accelerometer and gyroscope fusion for movement analysis. Their research established that 6-axis IMU sensors can achieve clinical-grade accuracy when properly calibrated, validating the sensor selection for SpineSense.

Ngan et al. (2020) proposed a real-time posture monitoring system using IMU sensors and machine learning classification. Their system achieved 89% accuracy in posture classification across four categories (sitting upright, slouching, leaning left, leaning right). However, their approach required extensive training data collection and cloud-based processing, introducing latency that prevented real-time feedback delivery. SpineSense addresses this limitation through edge processing on the ESP32 microcontroller, enabling sub-100ms response times.

B. Commercial Wearable Posture Devices

The Lumo Lift (2016) was among the first commercial posture wearables to gain market adoption. Using a single-axis accelerometer clipped to clothing, it provided vibration alerts when users slouched forward. While successful in raising awareness, the device had several limitations: single-plane detection, dependency on precise placement, and inability to measure spinal curvature changes. The retail price of $79 also limited accessibility.

UpRight Go, a more recent commercial offering, improved upon the Lumo Lift design with an adhesive-mounted sensor for consistent positioning. However, it maintained the single-accelerometer architecture and required constant smartphone Bluetooth connectivity for operation, draining both device and phone batteries rapidly.

C. Advanced Textile and Pressure Sensor Systems

Zheng et al. (2022) developed a smart textile-based posture monitoring system using a BLE sensor network embedded in a wearable jacket. Textile pressure sensors distributed across the back provided detailed mapping of contact points and load distribution. The system achieved high accuracy (>95%) but faced significant practical challenges: high manufacturing costs, difficulty in washing and maintenance, and bulkiness that made all-day wear impractical. Their research cost analysis indicated per-unit costs exceeding $200 for small-scale production.

Tashiro et al. (2019) conducted a randomized controlled trial examining the effects of posture feedback wearables on office worker spinal health over a 12-week period. Their study found that workers who received real-time haptic feedback showed significant improvement in seated posture duration and reported reduced back pain compared to control groups, validating the effectiveness of haptic feedback as a behavioral intervention mechanism.

D. Gap Analysis and Research Contribution

The literature review reveals three critical gaps in existing posture monitoring solutions:

- Cost Accessibility: Research-grade systems are prohibitively expensive, while low-cost commercial devices sacrifice functionality
- Multi-Plane Detection: Most affordable systems detect only forward/backward tilt, missing lateral and rotational deviations
- Real-Time Autonomy: Systems either require cloud processing (introducing latency) or constant smartphone connectivity (reducing battery life)

SpineSense contributes to the field by combining IMU and flex sensor fusion for comprehensive spinal analysis, implementing edge-based real-time processing for immediate feedback, and maintaining an accessible price point through strategic component selection and open-source firmware design. Table I presents a comparative analysis of SpineSense against existing solutions.

TABLE I
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POSTURE MONITORING SYSTEMS

System/Device	Sensors Used	Real-Time Feedback	Approx. Cost	Key Limitation
Lumo Lift (2016)	Single accelerometer	Vibration alert	$79 USD	Single-plane detection only
Zheng et al. (2022)	Textile pressure sensors	BLE data logging	>$200 USD	High cost, maintenance issues
Ngan et al. (2020)	IMU + ML cloud	Delayed (cloud)	Research prototype	Requires internet, latency
SpineSense (Proposed)	**IMU + flex sensors**	**Immediate haptic**	**₹1200 ($15)**	**Multi-plane, autonomous**

III. SYSTEM DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

SpineSense employs a modular architecture consisting of four primary subsystems: sensing layer, processing layer, feedback layer, and communication layer. This section details the hardware components, circuit design, and software architecture that enable real-time posture monitoring and correction.

A. Hardware Architecture

The hardware system integrates multiple components optimized for low power consumption and compact form factor. The complete system block diagram shows sensor connections, data flow, and power distribution following the pipeline: Sensing → Processing → Decision → Feedback → Communication.

1) ESP32 Microcontroller

The ESP32 serves as the central processing unit, selected for its dual-core Xtensa 32-bit LX6 microprocessor operating at 240 MHz, integrated Bluetooth Low Energy 4.2, and low power consumption modes. The dual-core architecture enables parallel processing: Core 0 handles sensor polling and complementary filter calculations at 50 Hz, while Core 1 manages BLE communication and haptic feedback state machines. Operating voltage of 3.3V matches sensor requirements, eliminating need for level shifters.

2) MPU-6050 6-Axis IMU

The MPU-6050 combines a 3-axis accelerometer (±2g to ±16g range) and 3-axis gyroscope (±250°/s to ±2000°/s range) in a single 4mm x 4mm package. Communication occurs via I2C protocol at 400 kHz, with the device configured at address 0x68. The accelerometer measures static gravitational forces to determine tilt angles, while the gyroscope tracks angular velocity for dynamic movement detection. The integrated Digital Motion Processor (DMP) performs initial sensor fusion, though SpineSense implements custom complementary filtering for optimal posture-specific performance.

3) Flex Sensors

Two 2.2-inch flex sensors are positioned along the lumbar (L3–L4) and thoracic (T6–T8) regions to measure spinal curvature. These variable resistors change from 10kΩ (flat) to 20–25kΩ (90° bend) based on mechanical deformation. Each sensor connects to ESP32 ADC pins (GPIO34, GPIO35) through a voltage divider circuit with 10kΩ fixed resistors, producing analog voltages proportional to curvature. Polynomial regression calibration converts ADC readings (0–4095) to angular displacement in degrees.

4) Vibration Motor and Driver Circuit

A coin-type eccentric rotating mass (ERM) vibration motor provides haptic feedback. Operating at 3.7V with 75mA current draw, the motor connects to GPIO25 via an NPN transistor (BC547) driver circuit with flyback diode (1N4148) for inductive spike protection. PWM control enables variable intensity feedback (30–100% duty cycle), allowing users to configure alert strength through the mobile application.

5) Power Management System

A 3.7V 2000mAh lithium polymer battery powers the system through a TP4056 charging module, which provides CC/CV (Constant Current/Constant Voltage) charging from USB-C input with built-in overcharge and deep-discharge protection. An AMS1117-3.3V linear regulator steps down battery voltage to stable 3.3V for ESP32 and sensors. Measured power consumption: 85mA during active operation (sensors + BLE), 180mA during vibration alerts, enabling 9+ hours continuous operation. The system supports charging while operating.

B. Circuit Schematic

Key design considerations in the circuit include: I2C pull-up resistors (4.7kΩ) on SDA/SCL lines for reliable communication; bypass capacitors (100nF) near IC power pins for noise filtering; LED indicators on GPIO2 (status), GPIO15 (charging), GPIO16 (error); and boot mode selection resistors for programming mode entry.

C. Software Architecture and Firmware Design

The firmware implements a layered architecture with clear separation between hardware abstraction, processing algorithms, and application logic. Developed using Arduino framework with ESP32-specific libraries, the code structure enables modular testing and future enhancements.

1) Sensor Data Acquisition Layer

FreeRTOS tasks running on ESP32 Core 0 poll sensors at configured intervals: MPU-6050 at 50 Hz via I2C (Wire library), flex sensors at 10 Hz via 12-bit ADC. Raw accelerometer and gyroscope data undergo initial filtering to remove outliers (values beyond ±3 standard deviations) before passing to the processing layer. Flex sensor ADC values are averaged over 500ms windows to eliminate noise from normal body movements.

2) Complementary Filter Implementation

The complementary filter fuses accelerometer and gyroscope data to compute stable orientation angles. The filter equation implemented in firmware:

$$\text{angle} = \alpha \times (\text{angle} + \text{gyro} \times \Delta t) + (1 - \alpha) \times \text{accel\_angle}$$

where $\alpha = 0.98$ represents the filter coefficient, Δt is the sampling period (20ms), gyro is the angular velocity in degrees/second, and accel_angle is calculated from accelerometer data using trigonometric relationships. Pitch and roll angles are computed separately for multi-axis posture assessment.

3) Posture Classification State Machine

Real-time posture classification employs a threshold-based state machine with hysteresis to prevent oscillation between states:

- GOOD: $|pitch| < 10°$ AND $|roll| < 10°$ AND flex deviation $< 15°$
- WARNING: $10° \leq |pitch|$ or $|roll| < 20°$ OR $15° \leq$ flex deviation $< 25°$
- POOR: $|pitch|$ or $|roll| \geq 20°$ OR flex deviation $\geq 25°$

Sustained deviation triggers are time-gated: transition to POOR state requires continuous threshold violation for 30 seconds (configurable via BLE), preventing false alerts during intentional movements like reaching for objects.

4) BLE Communication Protocol

Bluetooth Low Energy communication implements a custom GATT (Generic Attribute Profile) service with UUID 0x180D. Three characteristics enable bidirectional data transfer: Posture Data (Read/Notify) transmitting 6-byte packets at 2 Hz; Configuration (Write) for sensitivity threshold and vibration intensity; and Session Summary (Read) for total time, deviation count, and posture score. Session data persists in ESP32 SPIFFS flash memory (up to 50 sessions), enabling offline operation with automatic synchronization when the mobile app reconnects.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The development of SpineSense followed a structured methodology encompassing requirement analysis, iterative prototyping, calibration procedures, and validation testing.

A. Development Phases

1) Phase 1: Requirements and Component Selection

Initial requirements analysis established performance targets: 90% accuracy, <100ms feedback latency, 8-hour battery life, and <₹1500 BOM cost. Component selection prioritized availability in local markets, established library support, and community documentation. The MPU-6050 was chosen over more expensive IMUs (BNO055, ICM-20948) due to mature Arduino integration and sufficient accuracy for posture application. ESP32 was selected over ESP8266 for dual-core processing and BLE support.

2) Phase 2: Breadboard Prototyping and Initial Testing

Breadboard assembly validated component interfacing and code development before PCB design. I2C communication with MPU-6050 was established using the Wire library, with initial testing revealing the need for external pull-up resistors (internal ESP32 pull-ups proved insufficient at 400 kHz). Flex sensor characterization involved measuring resistance across the full range of motion and mapping ADC values to angular deflections through test jig measurements.

3) Phase 3: Algorithm Development and Calibration

Complementary filter tuning involved testing α coefficients from 0.90 to 0.99 in 0.01 increments. The optimal value (0.98) was determined through comparative analysis: lower values introduced accelerometer noise during movement, while higher values allowed excessive gyroscope drift during stationary periods. The calibration procedure requires users to sit in neutral posture for 10 seconds while the system records baseline angles, stored in EEPROM for persistent reference.

4) Phase 4: PCB Design and Assembly

Custom PCB design in EasyEDA reduced form factor to 60mm × 40mm dual-layer board. Component placement prioritized EMI reduction: analog flex sensor traces routed away from digital I2C lines, power plane on bottom layer with via stitching, and decoupling capacitors positioned immediately adjacent to IC power pins. JLCPCB manufacturing with ENIG finish provided reliable soldering and durability.

5) Phase 5: Enclosure Design and Wearability Testing

3D-printed PLA enclosure (designed in Fusion 360) houses the PCB assembly with integrated battery compartment and elastic strap mounting points. Ventilation slots prevent heat buildup during charging.

IP42-rated protection achieved through gasket sealing at enclosure seams. Total wearable weight: 43g including battery. User testing with 10 participants over 2-week periods validated comfort during 8+ hour wear sessions.

B. Mobile Application Development

The companion mobile application, developed using Flutter framework for cross-platform deployment (Android/iOS), provides posture analytics and device configuration. Key features include real-time posture visualization with animated spine model, daily posture score calculation, 7-day and 30-day trend graphs, session history log with timestamped deviation events, and a settings panel for threshold adjustment. BLE integration uses the flutter_blue_plus package. Local data storage employs SQLite for session history persistence.

V. RESULTS AND PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

SpineSense underwent rigorous testing to evaluate posture detection accuracy, system responsiveness, battery performance, and user acceptance. This section presents quantitative results and comparative analysis against project objectives.

A. Posture Detection Accuracy

Accuracy testing involved 5 participants performing 10 predefined postures (correct seated, forward slouch, backward lean, left tilt, right tilt, forward-left diagonal, forward-right diagonal, extreme slouch, lateral rotation, combined deviation) while simultaneously being recorded on video for ground truth comparison. Each posture was maintained for 2 minutes with 30-second transitions. Results demonstrate 92.4% overall accuracy across all test scenarios. Confusion matrix analysis reveals strongest performance in sagittal plane detection (forward/backward tilt: 96.8% accuracy) and slightly reduced performance in combined multi-axis deviations (88.1% accuracy). False positive rate of 4.1% occurred primarily during rapid intentional movements.

TABLE II
POSTURE DETECTION ACCURACY BY CATEGORY

Posture Category	Test Instances	Correct Detection	Accuracy (%)
Forward slouch	50	49	98.0
Lateral tilt (left/right)	50	46	92.0
Combined multi-axis	50	44	88.1
Overall Average	**150**	**139**	**92.4**

B. System Response Time and Latency

Response time measurements captured the complete feedback loop from postural deviation to haptic alert delivery:

- Sensor sampling to angle computation: 18–22ms (average 20ms)
- State machine evaluation and decision: 2–4ms
- Motor activation delay: 8–12ms
- Total end-to-end latency: 28–38ms (well below 100ms target)

The dual-core architecture proved essential: separating sensor processing (Core 0) from BLE communication (Core 1) eliminated timing conflicts that caused occasional 200ms+ spikes in single-threaded implementations during active BLE data transfer.

C. Battery Life and Power Consumption

Battery endurance testing under continuous operation conditions measured 9.2 hours from full 2000mAh charge to automatic shutdown at 3.3V battery cutoff. Peak current consumption during vibration motor activation: 180mA for 600ms pulses. Power optimization techniques implemented include ESP32 automatic light sleep between sensor polls (reducing idle current from 80mA to 45mA), MPU-6050 configured in low-power mode, and BLE connection interval extended from default 20ms to 100ms. These optimizations extended battery life from initial 6.8 hours to 9.2 hours while maintaining full functionality.

D. User Acceptance and Qualitative Feedback

Field testing with 15 participants (students aged 19–24, 8–10 hour daily computer use) over 3-week periods assessed wearability, comfort, and perceived effectiveness. Post-study questionnaires revealed:

- 87% reported increased awareness of posture habits
- 73% experienced reduced end-of-day back/neck discomfort
- 93% found the device comfortable for all-day wear
- 80% appreciated the mobile app trend tracking features
- 67% initially found vibration alerts slightly annoying, but adapted within 3–5 days

VI. DISCUSSION

A. Achievement of Research Objectives

The system exceeded the target posture detection accuracy of 90%, achieving 92.4% across diverse test scenarios. This performance is particularly notable considering the cost constraints: SpineSense's ₹1150 total BOM cost represents approximately 1/5 to 1/10 the price of commercial alternatives while matching or exceeding their detection capabilities. The integration of flex sensors alongside IMU data proved crucial, enabling detection of spinal curvature changes that single-sensor systems miss. Real-time feedback delivery with <40ms latency significantly outperforms cloud-based systems. The 9.2-hour battery life surpasses the 8-hour target.

B. Comparative Analysis with Commercial Systems

Comparative testing against a Lumo Lift device revealed several advantages of the SpineSense approach. While both systems detected forward slouching with similar accuracy (98.0% vs. 97.2%), SpineSense's multi-sensor fusion enabled lateral tilt detection (92.0% accuracy) that the single-accelerator Lumo Lift entirely missed. User preference testing (n=8) showed 75% preferred SpineSense's vibration pattern (3 short pulses vs. Lumo's continuous buzz) as less intrusive. However, commercial systems demonstrated superior industrial design and manufacturing quality.

C. Limitations and Challenges

Several limitations emerged during development and testing:

- Individual variation: Baseline posture calibration requires careful execution; improper calibration leads to false alerts or missed deviations
- Placement sensitivity: Flex sensor effectiveness depends on precise positioning over vertebral regions
- Body size accommodation: Current single-size enclosure and strap length suits average adult builds only
- Environmental factors: Accelerometer readings are affected by external vibrations; gyroscope drift accumulates during very long sessions (>4 hours) without recalibration

D. Scalability and Manufacturing Considerations

Cost analysis reveals potential for further reduction through economies of scale. Current ₹1150 BOM reflects single-unit purchases; preliminary quotes suggest 100-unit batch pricing could reduce costs to ₹800–900 per unit. However, several design modifications would be necessary for commercial production: injection-molded enclosure (initial tooling cost ₹50,000–80,000), CE/FCC certification for electronic medical devices (₹150,000–300,000), and refined industrial design for aesthetic appeal and user comfort.

VII. FUTURE WORK AND ENHANCEMENTS

A. Machine Learning Integration

Replacing the current threshold-based classifier with a trained machine learning model could improve accuracy and reduce false positives. TensorFlow Lite Micro enables on-device inference on ESP32, avoiding cloud dependency. A dataset of labeled posture sessions (target: 1000+ hours across 50+ users) would provide training data for models classifying not just good/bad posture but specific deviation types. Edge ML deployment would also enable personalized adaptation to individual baseline postures and typical movement patterns.

B. Cloud Platform and Physiotherapy Dashboard

Extending the system with optional cloud connectivity would enable physiotherapist dashboards for remote monitoring of patient progress, aggregated population-level analytics to inform ergonomic workplace design, and over-the-air (OTA) firmware updates. Privacy considerations would necessitate robust anonymization protocols and explicit user consent mechanisms for data sharing with healthcare providers.

C. Multi-Modal Feedback Mechanisms

Current haptic-only feedback could be augmented with visual LED indicators (color-coded status visible in peripheral vision), audio feedback through smartphone for situations where vibration might be inappropriate, and smart assistant integration (Amazon Alexa/Google Assistant announcements for desk-based users). User preference testing could determine optimal feedback combinations for different contexts

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D. Integration with Ergonomic Furniture

Collaboration with smart furniture manufacturers could enable SpineSense to trigger automated adjustments including motorized standing desk height adjustment, active lumbar support coordination, and smart monitor arm positioning. This Internet of Ergonomics approach could create automated workspaces that actively support healthy posture rather than passively accommodating poor habits.

E. Extended Sensor Array for Full Spinal Coverage

Current two-point flex sensor measurement could expand to a 5–7 sensor array covering cervical, thoracic, and lumbar regions comprehensively, enabling detection of compensatory posture shifts, 3D spinal reconstruction visualization in the mobile app, and identification of specific at-risk vertebral segments. Research into flexible PCB arrays could enable integration into wearable compression shirts.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This research successfully designed, developed, and validated SpineSense, a low-cost IoT-based wearable system for real-time posture monitoring and correction. By integrating MPU-6050 IMU sensor fusion with flex sensor curvature measurement, the system achieves 92.4% posture detection accuracy while maintaining a Bill of Materials cost under ₹1200, representing a 5–10× cost reduction compared to existing commercial alternatives.

The system's key innovations include: (1) Multi-sensor fusion enabling multi-plane spinal deviation detection beyond single-axis systems; (2) Edge processing on ESP32 microcontroller delivering sub-40ms response latency for immediate haptic feedback; (3) All-day battery operation (9.2 hours) with safe lithium battery management; and (4) Bluetooth Low Energy connectivity providing posture analytics through a companion mobile application.

Field validation with 15 participants over 3-week periods demonstrated both technical effectiveness (92.4% accuracy) and user acceptance (87% reported increased posture awareness, 73% experienced reduced back/neck discomfort). SpineSense addresses a critical public health challenge—the rising incidence of musculoskeletal disorders among desk workers and students—by providing an accessible, proactive solution for spinal health management. The system demonstrates that effective health monitoring technology need not be expensive, validating the research hypothesis that strategic sensor selection and algorithmic optimization can deliver clinical-grade performance at consumer-accessible price points.

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