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Influence of teacher-pupil relationship on pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies in selected public primary schools in Kibra, Nairobi County

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Abstract
This paper sought to examine the instructional role played by teachers with specific interest on how teacher-pupil relationships influence pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies. The study is conducted in selected public primary schools in Kibra, one of the most recognized informal settlements in Kenya and the largest urban slum in Africa. Guided by Holdaway's (1979) literacy development theoretical framework, this paper adopts a mixed method approach in data collection for both qualitative and quantitative data. The study targeted pupils enrolled in class three and four, and their respective teachers. Interviews, questionnaire and focus group discussion guides (FGDs) were used to collect data from 50 class three and four teachers and 348 pupils. Each focus group comprised of not more than 12 pupils. Purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were employed to sample the teachers and pupils respectively. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Nvivo software. Chi-square statistical formula was used to test the null hypotheses. The study recommends that in order for pupils to achieve improved acquisition of literacy competencies, teachers should cultivate deliberate efforts of attaining friendly relationships with all the learners.

Keywords: competencies, feedback, learners, pupils, teachers, teacher-pupil-relationship

Public Interest Statement
The study proposed strategies which may be adopted towards improvement of pupil literacy competencies in public primary schools in Kibra, Nairobi County. Previous studies done on Influence of teacher-pupil relationship on pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies have not shown the strategies which can be employed to improve pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies in the study area. The study provided insights on how teacher-pupil relationship may be used to positively impact acquisition of literacy competencies in a learning environment.

1.0 Introduction

In the past few decades, studies have shown that, despite the unprecedented increase in access to basic education globally, literacy competencies of pupils at lower primary school level have been steadily on the decline (Masina & Nono-Zarazua, 2015). A similar trend is indicated in sub-Saharan Africa where children enrolled in lower primary schools have showed low literacy rates (Kim et al., 2016). Several research findings in Kenya on levels of literacy competencies of early grade pupils also indicate that a large number of children enrolled in classes three and four transition to upper primary schools without mastery of basic literacy competencies (Piper, Zuilkowski & Mugenda, 2014). According to Uwezo (2016) and Gunderson (2014), this inefficiency is attributed to inadequate teacher professional preparedness as well as low positive teacher-pupil relationships, among others. Similarly, Chondhury (2014) posits that teacher instructional approaches play a vital role in assisting early grade learners to acquire and use literacy competencies. Research trends since 2010 to 2014 indicate that the level of literacy skills of early grade learners is to a large extent determined by teachers' instructional approaches coupled with the relationships exhibited between teachers and their pupils (Ercikan et al. 2015). In Kenya, research indicates that teacher-pupil relationships enhanced pupils' literacy competencies such as ability to read, write and speak in English as the language of instruction (Achola et al. 2016). It is therefore the view of the author in this paper that some of the main responsibilities of the respective class-teacher is to assist learners develop ability to read, write and speak better English language. This is because studies indicate that children's proficiency level in English language has a positive relationship with teacher's instructional role and approaches (Uwezo, 2016).

Studies by Uwezo (2014) and Wasanga, Ogle and Wambua (2010) also indicate that a significant number of lower primary pupils in class three and four do not possess foundational literacy competencies. For example, according to Uwezo (2014, p. 4) "less than a third of learners enrolled in class 3 and above, have basic class 2 level of literacy skills." The results of Uwezo's study infers that a significant number of lower primary pupils do not possess requisite literacy skills which is vital for their successful academic achievement and transition to upper primary classes. From the foregoing background, this paper looks into the influence of teacher-pupil relationships on pupil's acquisition of literacy competencies among pupils in selected public primary schools in Kibra, Nairobi. The study is guided by the following questions:

1) How does teacher ability to give support influence pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies?
2) What is the influence of teacher inability to give regular feedback on pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies?

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The significance of the interpersonal relationship between students and teachers has been widely recognized in research at all levels of education (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). McCormick et al. (2013) are right in asserting that there is a strong association between good teacher-pupil

relationships and academic achievement which is characterized by positive indicators such as teacher classroom support, care and frequent feedback to learners. This study sought to establish the extent to which the quality of teacher-pupil relationship influences acquisition of literacy competencies of pupils. Dowey (2013) asserts that teacher-pupil relationship has a positive correlation with pupils' learning outcomes such as improved literacy competencies and higher academic achievement of pupils. In view of the foregoing arguments, it is important to establish whether there is a correlation between the quality of teacher-pupil relationship and acquisition of literacy competencies.

A study examining teacher-student relationship in elementary schools in United States of America (USA) also found out that a positive teacher-student relationship was closely related to achievement of pupils' literacy competencies (McCormick & O'Connor, 2014). Educators and classroom instructors who are keen on enhancing pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies need to ensure that pupils have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers. Similarly, Cazden in his study (2001) corroborates this view by asserting that lower primary pupil's intellectual ability and educational outcomes are significantly related to the type of social relationships which they cultivate with their respective teachers and care givers.

According to O'Connor, Dearing and Collins (2011), learners who experience a warm and supportive relationship with the teacher may experience higher educational outcomes as well as possess feelings of safety and security. Positive teacher-pupil relationships have also been associated with higher academic achievement (Hughes et al., 2008). According to Hughes and Kwok (2007), pupils with close relationships with their teachers have a tendency to perform better on social and academic indicators of school success. On the contrary, pupils without positive relationships with teachers show less significant learning outcomes such as lack of demonstration of literacy skills (O'Connor et al., 2011).

While it is evident from a study by Weinstein (2011) that positive teacher-pupil relationships leads to better grades, few studies have established the effect of such relationships on teacher instructional role in pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies in public primary schools in informal settlements.

3.0 Designs and Methods

The study employs a mixed method approach (quantitative and qualitative) to help cross-validate, corroborate and ascertain complementarities in findings (Creswell, 2014). In addition, correlational, descriptive and causal comparative designs are applied to determine relationships between different variables of the study (Steinberg, 2015), establish associations between variables and to explain pupils' scores in literacy competencies, and establish cause-and-effect relationships between dependent and independent variables (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2006) respectively. The method was found relevant while measuring differences in pupils' scores in literacy competencies.

Quantitative data were collected using survey questionnaires. The questionnaires facilitated easy analysis of results which were established to be useful for comparative studies (Brace, 2018). Quantitative method was used for collection of a wide range of data using survey questionnaire, testing the theory of the study, showing and describing relationships between variables as well to generalize findings (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative method was used to capture perception of respondents. Specifically, the grounded theory was applied through systematic collection and analysis of qualitative data so as to construct theories grounded in the data themselves (Charmaz 2006). The study found qualitative design useful for collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Cohen et al., 2013). Qualitative data was collected through guided focus group discussions (FGDs) organized per school by class. Each FGD session comprised not more than 12 students and lasted for not more than 60 minutes (Flick, 2018).

The study sampled eight (8) public primary schools following common characteristics: (a)

classified as public and received staffing support from the Government of Kenya (b) implemented the 8:4:4 curriculum (c) situated within Kibra-informal settlement (d) staffed by at least one teacher per class as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Accessible Population in the 8 Public Primary Schools (pseudo names used for schools)*

S/N	SCHOOL	CLASS THREE (3)						CLASS FOUR (4)					
		No. of Pupils			No. of Teachers			No. of Pupils			No. of Teachers		
		B	G	TL	M	F	TL	B	G	TL	M	F	TL
1	Biafra	228	261	489	5	5	10	296	272	568	3	3	6
2	Emba	89	84	173	-	3	3	109	99	208	2	1	3
3	Kile	71	66	137	-	2	2	87	102	189	-	3	3
4	Mbau	50	60	110	-	3	3	61	70	131	-	3	3
5	Jiam	48	45	93	-	2	2	63	60	123	-	3	3
6	Baraka	58	52	110	-	2	2	62	51	113	-	2	2
7	Sky	38	32	70	-	2	2	48	46	94	-	2	2
8	Tempa	46	42	88	-	2	2	39	50	89	-	2	2
	TOTAL	628	642	1270	5	21	26	765	750	1515	5	19	24

Source: MoE Statistics, 2018   Key: B= Boys, G=Girls, M= Male, F= Female, TL= Total

Therefore, the total accessible population was 2785 pupils and 50 teachers, equalling 2835

All the eight (8) public primary schools with a total of 2785 class three and four pupils were sampled using slovin's statistical formula. A total of 50 teachers (26 and 24 from classes 3 and 4 respectively) were purposively sampled due to their homogeneous characteristics coupled with their in-depth knowledge in teaching literacy in early grade classes. In addition, a total of 50 teachers were statistically equivalent to 100% therefore representative enough to give the study findings credibility (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Stratified random-sampling method was used to select pupils according to their respective sample proportion, class and gender (boys and girls). The procedure helped to ensure adequate representation per category of the sample. The population of respondents was established to be: (a) 170 class three pupils (42%), (b) 178 class four pupils (45%), (c) 26 class three teachers (7%), and (d) 24 class four teachers (6%). The total sample size was 398 respondents. In order to determine the estimated sample size for pupils enrolled in both class three and four the following Slovin's statistical formula was employed by the researcher:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$ Where n = Sample Size, N = the total population, 1 = constant, e = limit of sampling error. Assuming a sampling error of 0.05, this can be computed as shown below:

$$n = \frac{2785}{1 + 2785(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{2785}{8}$$

$$= 348$$

Therefore, the total number of pupils who participated in the study was 348. In addition, a total of 50 teachers (purposively sampled from class 3 and 4) formed part of the respondents. This was because of their in-depth knowledge in teaching literacy in early grade classes. The number of focus groups per school was determined by the sample size in Table 2.

Table 2. *The Sample Size per School (pseudo names used to identify schools)*

	School	Class 3		Class 4		Total		Teaching Staff			
		B	G	B	G	TL	%	M	F	TL	%
1	Biafra	32	34	33	33	132	38	8	8	16	32
2	Emba	14	10	12	12	48	13	2	4	6	12
3	Kile	10	8	10	12	40	12	-	5	5	10
4	Mbau	7	8	7	8	30	9	-	6	6	12
5	Jiam	7	6	7	7	27	8	-	5	5	10
6	Baraka	7	6	8	7	28	8	-	4	4	8
7	Sky	6	4	6	4	20	6	-	4	4	8
8	Tempa	5	6	6	6	23	6	-	4	4	8
	TOTAL	88	82	89	89	**348**	**100**	10	40	50	**100**

Source: Author, 2019

Both qualitative and quantitative data from respondents were concurrently collected and analyzed (Creswell 2009) using Nvivo statistical software and SPSS software (Edhlund & Mcdougall, 2013) respectively. In the questionnaire items, respondents' opinions and perception were assigned specific values and rated on a 1-5 Likert scale. More so, the perceptions and opinions of the respondents on teacher-pupil relationships on acquisition of literacy competencies were analyzed. Coding was done word-by-word and line-by-line using Nvivo Statistical Software (NSS) to create nodes. The process ensured that the respondents' ideas were captured accurately devoid of any personal biases (Flikr, 2006).

Results

The study sought to find out the extent to which teacher-pupil relationship influence pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies. In order to address this, the author draws attention to two pertinent issues i.e. how does teacher ability to give support influence pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies? and, what is the influence of teacher inability to give regular feedback on pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies? The findings are resented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Teacher-Student Relationship Characteristics*

Results show that pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies was measured across all the seven literacy competencies namely; reading, writing, speaking, listening, comprehension, vocabulary and alphabet knowledge. The study indicates that the dependent variables were ordinal in nature with five categories each; below 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, and 80% and above. Further, the study examined the extent to which teacher's ability to give support correlated with acquisition of literacy competencies. Results were ordinal in nature with three categories of strongly agree, agree and somewhat agree. The study established that a majority of the respondents (80%) had a perception that teachers' ability to give support had a positive influence on acquisition of pupils' literacy competencies. Fifty eight (58%) of the respondents had a high rating on the influence at which teacher friendly body language influenced acquisition of literacy competencies. However, 64% of respondents had a perception that inability to give feedback to pupils and unwillingness to show empathy (50%) had a lesser contribution on pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies. This implied that teacher-pupil relationship played a significant role in acquisition of pupils' literacy competencies. On the contrary, the percentages of respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed were negligible ranging from 2% and 4% respectively.

The above findings was illustrated by participants in FGD8 and FGD10 who explained that they were given support in developing reading fluency as teachers listened to them as they read stories aloud; retold stories already learnt and pronounced new words. Other forms of teacher support received included, guided writing, handwriting, appropriate spelling of words, punctuations and sentence construction. Teachers also offered support to participants in small groups. "Whenever some participants found difficulties in reading and writing, they received guidance in groups and at times individually" (Extract from 2th and 6nd female participants).

Further results indicate that pupils' scores could relate to specific competencies. For example, it was established that alphabet knowledge (62%), reading (58%), writing (51%), and listening (35%) have a positive contribution to pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies. In totality, these results show that whenever a teacher is able to provide support to pupils during literacy instructions, pupils' literacy competencies in the above domains improved considerably. This was corroborated by respondents in T23, T27 and T33, who explained that,

> Pupils were able to acquire improved literacy competencies such as reading, writing, vocabulary and alphabetical knowledge because teachers spent adequate time in guiding and supporting them. Most of learners could only do better whenever they were supported during classroom group activities. They felt that it was their responsibility to give pupils support and guidance if they had to acquire literacy competencies. It was their feeling that a majority of pupils did not have a conducive learning environment at home.

The above results therefore show that teacher pupil relationship had a positive influence on pupil acquisition of literacy competency skills. The teacher-pupil relationship was characterized by teacher's ability to give support and regular feedback to learners.

Relationship between teachers' ability to give support and acquisition of literacy competencies
This was reported as depicted in the findings presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Teachers' ability to give support and pupil's literacy competencies*

Teacher's ability to give support	Pupils' scores	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Comprehension	Vocabulary	Alphabet Knowledge
	p-value	0.035*	0.04*	0.067	0.014*	0.062	0.051	0.007*

*$p < .05$

The results show that the statistics of literacy competencies are all significant apart from comprehension ($p=0.062$), vocabulary ($p=0.051$) and speaking ($p=0.067$) whose p values are greater than 0.05.

Descriptive statistics on the other hand show that the pupil literacy scores were higher when the teacher is able to give support, and reduces as the teacher's ability to give support diminishes. For instance, 36.7% of pupils scored 80% and above in alphabet knowledge when the teacher is able to give support. These results show that teachers' ability to give support had a positive influence on pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies.

The relationship between teachers' inability to give regular feedback and acquisition of literacy competencies

The study sought to establish the relationship between teachers' inability to give regular feedback to pupils and acquisition of literacy competencies. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Teachers' Inabilities to Provide Regular Feedback to Pupils*

Teachers inability to give regular feedback to pupils	Pupils' scores	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Comprehension	Vocabulary	Alphabet Knowledge
Strongly agree	Below 40%	0	0	4	0	2	2.04	0
	50%	2	14	8	12	4	16.33	0
	60%	24	12	34	22	28	16.33	6
	70%	16	16	18	8	18	22.45	30
	80% and Above	22	22	0	22	12	8.16	28
Agree	Below 40%	0	2	2	0	0	2.04	0
	50%	2	6	6	8	4	6.12	0
	60%	4	8	10	0	10	8.16	4
	70%	6	0	0	8	4	0	6
	80% and Above	6	2	0	2	0	0	8
Somewhat agree	Below 40%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	50%	0	2	4	0	0	0	0
	60%	2	4	2	2	4	6.12	0
	70%	4	0	0	4	2	0	6
	80% and Above	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	Below 40%	0	2	0	0	0	2.04	0
	50%	2	2	4	0	4	2.04	4
	60%	2	4	2	6	2	4.08	4
	70%	4	0	2	4	4	2.04	2
	80% and Above	2	2	2	0	0	0	0
Strongly disagree	Below 40%	0	0	0	0	2	2.04	0
	50%	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
	60%	2	0	2	2	0	0	2
	70%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	80% and Above	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The results show that teachers' inability to give regular feedback leads to insignificant values that show pupils' scores as greater than 0.05 as shown in Table 5. When asked about their perception on teachers' inability to give them feedback after literacy lessons, some participants in FGD8, 9 and 11 said that,

> Our teachers frequently give us feedback on reading activities, writing, and comprehension exercises. As often as we read aloud stories in the classroom, our teachers tell us that we are good children. This makes us glad and keeps us encouraged to work hard. Whenever our work is not corrected by our teachers we get discouraged and wait until the teachers give us feedback.

In addition to the above opinion 89% of the respondents expressed the view that a majority of teachers frequently gave pupils feedback. This was illustrated by some participants in FGD4, 6 and 7 who explained that,

> Whenever they failed to get feedback from their teachers, they felt discouraged and it affected their participation in the subsequent lessons. But on the whole, they felt that their teachers were good in giving feedback inform which was done through marked assignments and verbally in class. It was their view that feedback formed an important part of the learning process. They appreciated the fact that feedback helped them in the process of acquisition of literacy competencies such as, comprehension, reading and writing skills. It was their view that frequent feedback from their teachers made them perform well in their daily literacy assignments (Extract from 2nd, 6th and 8th FGD participant).

The sentiments of the respondents above confirmed that teachers' ability to give feedback to learners was not only regular but also had a positive contribution towards acquisition of pupils' literacy competencies.

The study further sought to establish the significance of the relationship between teachers' inability to give regular feedback and pupils' literacy competency scores. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Teachers' Inabilities to Give Regular Feedback and Pupils' Literacy Competency Scores*

Teachers inability to give regular feedback to pupils	Pupils' scores	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Comprehension	Vocabulary	Alphabet Knowledge
	p-value	0.067	0.011*	0.014*	0.063	0.075	0.061	0.046*

*p < .05

Results show that literacy competencies are all statistically significant apart from reading (p=0.067), comprehension (p=0.075), vocabulary (p=0.061) and listening (p=0.063) whose p values are greater than 0.05 significance level.

The relationship between teachers' ability to give regular feedback and acquisition of literacy competencies

The study also sought to establish the relationship between teachers' ability to give regular feedback and acquisition of literacy competencies. This is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. *Teacher's ability to give regular feedback and acquisition of literacy competencies*

Literacy Competencies	r	p
Reading	0.1091	0.0451*
Writing	0.3914	0.005**
Speaking	0.2138	0.051
Listening	0.1093	0.064
Comprehension	0.2879	0.043*
Vocabulary	0.3398	0.017*
Alphabet Knowledge	0.4123	0.003**

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Results show that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' ability to give regular feedback to pupils and acquisition of literacy competencies apart from speaking (p=0.051) and listening (p=0.064). The results illustrated in Table 6 are complemented by the following FGD 19 participants who explained that,

> Their teachers often gave them feedback on assignments related to, written sentences, pronunciation, and fluency in reading aloud, spelling, word study, grammar, comprehension and composition writing. The feedback from teachers helped in motivating them to work harder so that they could be more fluent in literacy competencies. Their teachers also gave feedback inform of rewarding best performance in class (Extract from 1st male, 7th female and 10th male FGD19 participants).

These sentiments confirmed that teachers' ability to give regular feedback to learners had a positive contribution towards acquisition of pupils' literacy competencies. The hypotheses of the study were:
Hypothesis 1 (a): Teacher-pupil relationship does not influence pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies in selected public primary schools in Kibra-informal settlement.
The hypothesis results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. *The Influence of Teacher's Ability to Give Support on Pupils' Acquisition of Literacy Competencies*

Literacy Competencies	p
Reading	0.038*
Writing	0.030*
Speaking	0.023*
Listening	0.025*
Comprehension	0.069
Vocabulary	0.052

*p < 0.05

The results illustrate that teacher's ability to give support does influence pupils' acquisition of literacy skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and alphabet knowledge at 0.05.
Hypothesis 1(b): Teacher inability to give regular feedback to pupils does not influence pupils'

acquisition of literacy competencies. The results are given in Table 8.

Table 8. *The Influence of Teachers' Inability to Give Regular Feedback on Pupils' Literacy Competencies*

Literacy Competencies	p
Reading	0.051
Writing	0.067
Speaking	0.061
Listening	0.055
Comprehension	0.004*
Vocabulary	0.053
Alphabet Knowledge	0.001**

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

The p value results show that teachers' inability to give regular feedback to pupils does not significantly influence pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies, except for comprehension ($p < 0.05$) and alphabet knowledge ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion of Findings
Recent studies show that there is a strong relationship between pupil acquisition of literacy competencies and teacher-pupil relationship which is positively characterized by indicators such as teacher classroom support, care and frequent feedback to learners. In this study descriptive data established that most of the respondents (80%) had a perception that teachers' ability to give support positively influenced pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies. Fifty eight (58%) of the respondents showed high rating of the influence of teacher friendly body language on pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies. This implied that teacher-pupil relationship plays an important role in acquisition of pupils' literacy competencies. On the contrary, it is important to observe that in the same study the percentages of respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed were negligible ranging from 2% and 4% respectively.

Therefore, the study finding concurred with Dowey's (2013) and O'Connor's (2011) assertion that teacher-pupil relationship has a positive correlation with achievement of pupils' educational outcomes. The authors posit that a positive teacher pupil relationship is characterized by provision of teacher support, care and guidance offered to learners during instructional process (McCormick & O'Connor, 2014; Dowey, 2013). However, contrary to the previous studies which was conducted in the United States of America and employed qualitative design only, the current study applied mixed method approach with both quantitative and qualitative designs. In addition, the current study focused on schools in urban slum setting while the previous studies did not.

The study finding is also in agreement with the findings of Hughes and Kwok (2007, 39), O'connor et al. (2011, 120) and Weinstein, 2019, 53) which established that teacher-pupil relationship has a significant influence on acquisition of pupils' literacy competencies. For example, in the current study it was established through hypothesis test that teachers' ability to give support does influence pupils' acquisition of literacy skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and alphabet knowledge at 0.05.

Conclusion
The study established that a majority of respondents had the perception that teacher-pupil relationship has a positive influence on acquisition of literacy competencies of pupils. However, such influence was mostly notable in reading, writing and comprehension competencies which in this study have shown

positive results among the pupils. This study confirms that generally, for young children specially the school going pupils to thrive, it is necessary that they have positive and secure relationships with the adults in whom trust on acquiring these skills can be put.

Recommendations

The study has shown that a majority of teachers had requisite professional qualifications and adequate teaching experience. This was demonstrated by high literacy scores as well as the general perception of a majority of the respondents who said that teachers were well prepared. However, there is still need to strengthen teacher instructional capacity especially in the area of literacy instruction through enhanced pupil-teacher relationships. Despite the notable professional qualifications of a majority of the teachers, pupils still performed dismally in certain literacy areas. There is need to improve teacher instructional capacity in order to achieve improved pupils' acquisition of literacy competencies. This could be achieved through enhancing teacher instructional capacity building. The focus of such an initiative would include; literacy friendly teaching approaches, effective lesson preparation and quality teacher-pupil relationship.

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