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WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK: STUDENTS' PERCEPTION AND PREFERENCES

Research Article

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Abstract

There have been noticeable studies probing into how written corrective feedback (WCF) could help to improve EFL students' awareness of grammatical terms. However, a few are known to investigate how the students' perceptions and preferences could prompt their approbation toward the feedback. This study reports on Indonesian university students' views of written corrective feedback in a writing class. Furthermore, their preferences for different types of WCF are also investigated. This survey study collected data by distributing a questionnaire to 387 participants from two different universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The results indicated that although the participants favored different types of feedback, all of them shared a sympathetic attitude towards the feedback given. In particular, they believed that WCF could facilitate to improve their writing skills and language knowledge. Through WCF, they became aware of what to avoid and improve to create good writing. The results further indicated that of several different types of feedback strategies, direct feedback performed as the most favored to improve students' writing skills, followed by metalinguistic, reformulation, and indirect strategy. Overall, the findings ratified the value of WCF for EFL students in Indonesia. More research in this area are expected to furnish more contributive information.

Keywords: EFL students, perception, writing, written corrective feedback

1. Introduction

Writing is now becoming the most essential skill to excel in many professions and fields of study. For students of higher education, writing ability is required as they are encouraged to actively write in terms of researching and sharing knowledge. Furthermore, writing ability facilitates students to elevate their communication, self-expression and learning performance (Graham, 2006). Also, it is contributive to foster students' learning performance and academic achievement (Liao and Wong, 2010).

Despite the fact that writing is essential and valuable for students, it is seen as the most difficult and complex skill to learn since many language elements are involved (Harmer, 2004). In writing, students are encouraged to express and pour their thoughts and ideas into written

form and make sure that it is meaningful, readable, and understandable by the readers. However, Santangelo, Harris, & Graham (2007) elaborated that students' struggle in writing is a result of lack of knowledge, ineffective methods, lack of planning, content generation, revisions, transcription, low persistence, and unrealistic self-efficacy. That writing skills are judged difficult and complex to learn has been proven by Richards & Renandya (2002) and Jahin (2012). They revealed that writing skills are perceived as challenging and difficult by the students. Not only for students is writing skills also seen as challenging even by experienced writers (Zumbrunn, Marrs, & Mewborn, 2015). Therefore, the writing process suggested by Harmer (2004) should perform as one of the solutions to solve the issue. One of the stages in the writing process is the revising/editing stage where the students' writing is reviewed and corrected by their lecturer or peers and further given feedback as input for the students. In this stage, any inappropriate use of language function or unclear and confusing ideas will get suggestions as to the references for revisions. Through this stage, students are expected to gain knowledge and improve their writing performance.

Further, some researchers (e.g.: Hedge, 2005; Carless, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Rowe, 2008; Taylor, 2011; Srichanyachon, 2012; Trabelsi, 2019) also emphasized that the implementation of feedback is constructive for students' writing improvement. This stage facilitates them to obtain and demonstrate mastery in the use of targeted linguistic forms and structures. It fosters their academic encouragement and interaction by portraying how well they are doing and what they need to improve.

The feedback provision can be done through two techniques; written and oral. Since this research focuses on the feedback which is provided through written form, it focuses on written corrective feedback (WCF). However, the implementation of WCF is somehow still debatable as both positive and negative impacts will likely entail. Armhein & Nassaji (2010) stated that when the feedback is perceived useless, it will be neglected. Meanwhile, when the students find it useful, they will accept and work on the feedback and grow from it. Further, Pajares (2003); Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006); Shirota (2016) argued that the provision of feedback in writing leads to students' improvement in writing motivation and self-regulation. Meanwhile, Robinson et al. (2013) claimed that it contributes to creating negative emotional responses and discouraging their writing motivation. This supports Truscott's (1999) theory saying that the provision of corrective feedback only negatively influences students' learning process.

Given the importance of writing and its challenges and difficulties at the same time, exploring how students perceive feedback practice is considered essential to research. Many studies regarding students' perceptions of WCF have been conducted. Several previous studies have shown that students' perceptions of feedback provision are related to their writing motivation, self-regulation, and achievement (Ekholm et al., 2015; Magno & Amarles, 2011; Zumbrunn et al., 2013). Marrs (2016) found that most of the students perceived WCF positively. However, 12% of the research participants perceived it negatively as they were not in favor of writing. They assumed that the implementation of WCF was demotivating due to the bad comments on their writing performance. In line with this, Gamlem & Smith (2013) found that students' perceptions were divided into certain conditions regarding how feedback is delivered and treated. The way students perceive feedback depends on how it is provided and how it is employed in the learning process.

Moreover, the effectiveness of its implementation is affected by feedback-giving strategies. Many studies were conducted by Ellis (2009) regarding students' preferences of WCF strategies elaborated (e.g.: direct, indirect, metalinguistic, focused, unfocused, reformulation, electronic). Unfortunately, they focused only on certain strategies or comparing two strategies

that are commonly applied in the learning process. Therefore, this study tried to expose all the WCF strategies which students have experienced. Students' preferences of written corrective feedback strategies should be taken into account as; (1) it figures out the effectiveness of its practice (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006); (2) it contributes to a great influence on their response towards using the feedback in learning (Schulz, 2001); (3) it contributes to the acknowledgment of the other factors that encourage the learning process and its outcomes as they facilitate students' self-esteem, self-concept, and self-efficacy in learning (Birenbaum, 2007). It should be noted that indistinct and incomprehensive feedback may be considered unhelpful by the students (Rowe, 2008). In fact, the strategies applied in providing the feedback is commonly not suitable with the students' needs and expectation resulting in students' demotivated learning interest and inability to understand the incomprehensive feedback. Thus, the strategies in providing written feedback to students should also be concerned because they may be motivating or demotivating the students.

The issues emerging in the field of feedback provision encouraged the researcher to conduct a further investigation on students' perceptions of written corrective feedback and their preferences of the WCF strategy employed in the writing classroom. Their perceptions, which were also influenced by their preferences of WCF strategy, portray the effectiveness of its implementation in the writing classroom. The findings will help teachers to get a better understanding of how to convince the students to consider feedback positively and to be willing to employ it for their improvement. With all these things in mind, in order to deeply investigate the students' perceptions of WCF and the strategy that they prefer at most, the current study aims at addressing some research questions as follows:

1. What are the students' perceptions of written corrective feedback?
2. What are the WCF strategies preferred by the students in the writing classroom?

2. Methodology

This study was undertaken as a survey study. Gurbuz (2017) mentioned that a survey study is proved to be instrumental in measuring someone's attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, expectation, and preferences in a certain subject. It is applied to describe behaviors and gather people's perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about a current issue in education (Creswell, 2008; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voeltge, 2010). The data in survey design is obtained from a large number of the group, which is generalized back to a larger group.

The participants of this study were 387 undergraduate students of English Literature and English Education who were joining a writing class in two universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They were purposively chosen as they experienced WCF practice in their writing classroom.

The data were obtained by disseminating a questionnaire to the participants. 38 questions were divided into two categories; a. students' perceptions of WCF; b. students' preferences of WCF strategy. The questionnaire was 5-point Likert scale; 1: 'strongly disagree'; 2: 'disagree'; 3: 'neutral'; 4: 'agree'; 5: 'strongly agree'. The questionnaire was adapted from Marrs (2016) and Rowe & Wood (2008). Prior to disseminating the questionnaire to the participants, it was initially assessed by experts to confirm the comprehensiveness and readability of the items. It was then distributed for a pilot study to 30 students. Further, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was 0.87 for the students' perceptions questionnaire and 0.90 for the students' preferences questionnaire by using Cronbach's alpha. This internal consistency indicated that the questionnaires met the acceptable internal consistency.

The questionnaires were distributed to the participants who were joining the writing classroom, where the written corrective feedback was implemented. The participants

responded to the questionnaire based on their experience during the learning process. The data gained from the questionnaire were then examined and analyzed using Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The descriptive statistics method was employed in analyzing the data that resulted in data in the form of a percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The findings were then used to address and discuss the objective of this research.

3. Findings

3.1 Students' Perceptions of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) in Writing Classroom

The investigation on how students perceive WCF implementation was obtained from their views that were formed from their experience and expectations of WCF practice. The obtained data indicated that most of the students disagreed to say that feedback posed as pressure to them (50%), discouraging (42%), and frustrating them (52%). They claimed that WCF implementation had been useful for their knowledge-enrichment (57%) and encouraged them to become a better writer (51%). They claimed that the feedback given demonstrated what they did right and wrong in the writing practice (60%; 65%), and how to improve their inappropriate language use in writing (59%). This definitely urged the students to learn more and perform better in their next writing practice. Students' responses toward WCF implementation in the writing classroom are elaborated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of WCF

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Feedback on my writing is frustrating	17%	52%	20%	10%	1%	2.26
Feedback on my writing makes me feel proud	1%	14%	35%	44%	7%	3.40
Feedback on my writing makes me feel happy	1%	9%	32%	50%	9%	3.59
Feedback on my writing makes me giving up	29%	50%	11%	7%	2%	2.04
The feedback I get on writing makes me want to become a better writer	0%	2%	9%	51%	38%	4.24
Feedback on my writing makes me feel like I am a bad writer	15%	42%	22%	18%	3%	2.52
Feedback makes me feel like I am a good writer	3%	24%	40%	28%	4%	3.05
Feedback on my writing makes me feel confident	1%	20%	32%	42%	5%	3.30
Feedback on my writing makes me feel hopeless	21%	58%	13%	6%	2%	2.09
Feedback on my writing is unhelpful	47%	45%	6%	2%	1%	1.66
Feedback helps me write better next time	1%	1%	4%	52%	43%	4.36
Feedback tells me what I did well in my writing	1%	8%	12%	60%	19%	3.88
Feedback explains what I did wrong in my writing	0%	2%	5%	65%	28%	4.18
Feedback makes me a better writer	1%	2%	9%	61%	28%	4.14
I use feedback to help me write better next time	1%	1%	7%	57%	35%	4.24
Feedback on my writing encourages me to do better next time	1%	2%	7%	60%	31%	4.19
Feedback on my writing is helpful	1%	1%	5%	55%	37%	4.27
Feedback tells me how to make my writing better	1%	2%	6%	59%	32%	4.21

Scale: 1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

3.2 Students' Preferences of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) Strategy in Writing Classroom

In this study, all WCF strategies elaborated by Ellis (2009) were exposed in the questionnaire. It focused on giving a deeper overview of the feedback-giving strategy that might be employed in the teaching and learning process, and the students had been allowed to explore their preference in a wider context of WCF. The elaboration of the WCF strategy can be seen in Table 2.

The data obtained from the questionnaire revealed that most of the participants were more likely to choose direct feedback ($M = 3.8; 3.91; 4.04$). They perceived the implementation of direct strategy positively. Thus, it can be inferred that students preferred a direct corrective feedback strategy where their errors/mistakes in writing had been directly revised by their lecturer as they were encouraged (57%) and could reflect on what they did wrong (66%). However, it did not mean that they totally ignored the other strategies to be implemented in the practice. Positive responses towards the other strategies were also represented in the questionnaire outcomes.

The other strategies that were more preferred by the students included metalinguistic, reformulation, and indirect strategy, respectively. There was only a slight difference of mean within these strategies ($M = 4.17; 4.11; 3.35; 2.89$). Therefore, it can be concluded that the combination of the strategies would give such a great contribution to the respondents' improvement in writing. Through the combination of direct and metalinguistic strategy, they would get a clear correction on their writing. Further, the use of a reformulation strategy would give the students more references for appropriate words to be used in more natural writing in EFL.

Further, regarding the scope of the lecturer's correction, the respondents expected the feedback to focus on certain errors/mistakes in providing feedback ($M = 4.30; 3.54; 3.47$). They agreed that specific feedback enhanced them to understand what they did wrong in the writing (47%) and feel more encouraged to improve if certain language elements have been corrected (48%). Besides, the feedback given should focus on crucial errors/mistakes. They argued that correcting all the errors did not prove efficient. The students would find their writing as a mess due to many corrections written on the paper leading to discouragement. Furthermore, as technology has developed, the feedback-giving can be provided through a medium (computer/laptop) or directly written on students' work. However, the data obtained demonstrated that the students had no objection whether the feedback is given through electronic devices or not ($M = 3.20; 3.04; 3.13$).

Table 2. Students' preferences in the WCF strategy.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Providing the right forms of the errors	2%	9%	12%	63%	14%	3.80
Providing the right forms is encouraging	0%	6%	16%	57%	20%	3.91
Knowing the right forms assists in reflecting on the errors	1%	3%	9%	66%	21%	4.04
Giving codes/cues through the errors	2%	24%	22%	40%	13%	3.39
Providing only codes is helpful for a better understanding	4%	17%	15%	52%	12%	3.52
Providing codes encourages the learning motivation	2%	17%	22%	47%	13%	3.53
Underlining or circling the errors without any codes or revisions is better for learning	3%	16%	14%	47%	19%	3.63
Locating the errors only trains to analyze and think critically	2%	15%	23%	48%	12%	3.53
Locating the errors only is highly suggested for learning improvement	6%	26%	26%	34%	8%	3.12
The corrections should be specific	1%	1%	9%	47%	42%	4.30
Feedback should focus only on certain crucial errors	1%	14%	26%	47%	12%	3.54
Focusing on crucial errors motivates me to learn more	1%	16%	25%	48%	10%	3.49
Correcting all errors encourages me to be more aware of my writing	11%	46%	22%	18%	3%	2.55
Correcting any errors motivates me to gain more knowledge	27%	60%	7%	6%	0%	4.06
Correcting any errors is helpful for me	4%	19%	25%	44%	8%	2.66
Providing more natural words/phrases in writing enriches my language knowledge	5%	44%	25%	24%	3%	2.76
Giving the native-like version of writing is highly suggested	0%	2%	10%	55%	33%	4.18
Providing the correction through electronic devices facilitates me to review the correction	5%	29%	20%	34%	12%	3.20
The use of electronic devices eases the revision process	4%	29%	31%	33%	4%	3.04
It is clearer to review the feedbacks through electronic devices	4%	27%	26%	35%	7%	3.13
Scale: 1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neutral 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree						

4. Discussion

The research findings regarding students' perceptions of WCF implementation reveal that the feedback was frequently provided by the lecturers. Meanwhile, the provision of feedback is always needed by the students. The participants admitted that the WCF given contributed to their writing improvement. In the Indonesian context, this finding is similar to Gamlem, 2013; Seker & Dincer, 2014; Trabelsi, 2019 and Rosdiana, 2016; Listiani, 2017; Mulati, 2018 who found that feedback is claimed helpful by the students. They found WCF implementation motivated them to improve their writing ability as it demonstrated what they did wrong in the writing. It enhanced them to achieve their targeted progress in their writing. In line with this, Alhosani (2008) agreed that the goal of giving corrective feedback is to minimize students' errors, maximize students' writing clarity, and improve their proficiency in writing. Moreover, it is also helpful to reduce students' anxiety in learning and practicing writing (Loreto and McDonough, 2014).

Wellington (2010) in Ekholm (2014) claimed that positive perceptions created useful and beneficial feedback, while negative perceptions resulted in students' inability to engage with it (Price et al. 2010). Similar to this, Trabelsi (2019) also found that the students became satisfied with the feedback provided as the teacher introduced the use of it and discussed the type of feedback strategy that students' prefer to be applied, the error codes, and the types of comments that the teacher should provide. This study found that that feedback potentially enhanced students to improve writing skills. It informed the participants about what to avoid in creating better writing as the feedback contained clues/points of what they did wrong in the writing and how they revised it. They agreed that the feedback given encouraged them to perform better in their next writing and be a better writer. However, this finding is in contrast with Marrs and Zumbrunn's (2016) finding in which some of the participants exhibited negative perceptions toward written corrective feedback. They asserted that the feedback given contained bad comments about their writing ability. Thus, they perceived its implementation unhelpful and got their learning motivation decreased.

Even though the students admitted that written corrective feedback facilitated their writing improvement, they claimed that they sometimes dealt with incomprehensive feedback which led them into confusion. Brookhart (2008) and Sadler (1998) in Gamlem (2013) stated that the provision of feedback should be followed up as it is not always well-received by the learners. It aims at ensuring that the feedback given fills the gap of students' lack of knowledge and completes their knowledge to perform better on their next writing tasks.

Furthermore, participants' perceptions of written corrective feedback are categorized into affective and cognitive components of perceptions. Caffarella and Barnett (2000); Varlander (2008); Wellington (2010) in Ekholm (2014) claimed that higher education students tend to have affective reactions towards feedback received in their tasks. They belong to the sociological and attitude elements of the affective component as they represent their expectations of feedback provision on their writing tasks. Hereinafter, this finding also reflected participants' perceptions from the view of the cognitive component as their belief, knowledge, and expectations of written corrective feedback practice in the writing classroom are formed from their experience. Holder (1978) indicated that the cognitive component of perception is formed from the perceivers' assumptions of an object or situation which is influenced by factual events and experience.

Students' preferences of the WCF strategy is perceived as useful to support the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (WCF) practice in writing. Schulz (2001) stated that when an appropriate strategy is applied, the learners tend to pay attention to the feedback rather than those who do not. Some research (Rollinson, 2005; Shawish and Abdelraheem, 2010;

Grombczewska, 2011) have elaborated that dissimilar feedback sources and strategies conduce learners' anxiety and demotivation in writing. Unfortunately, most research regarding the WCF strategy only compares two strategies, direct and indirect strategies. Goksoy and Nazli (2016) reviewed that these two strategies are considered as the major strategies that are overly discussed in the research. It limits the overview of WCF strategy as if the other strategies do not work and contribute to learners' improvement. Meanwhile, other strategies are also contributively useful for learners' improvement in writing. Therefore, to give more extensive insights about what strategy the students prefer to be applied in the written corrective feedback practice, their preference is scrutinized from all strategies elaborated by Ellis (2009).

The research findings obtained indicate that most of the participants prefer receiving a direct feedback strategy to receiving other strategies. Through it, they claimed that it can help them reflect on what they did wrong and encourage them to learn more as their mistakes are directly revised. This finding is similar to the one found by Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Black and Nanni, 2016; Karimi, 2016; Kisananto, 2016; and Husniah, 2018. They uncovered that students significantly were in favor of direct feedback to indirect feedback strategy in their writing correction as the application of direct strategy provided them with an immediate understanding of their mistakes since they valued accuracy above anything else. In line with this, Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen (2009) argued that directly-corrected mistakes facilitated the students to improve better in accuracy compared to indirectly-corrected ones. Meanwhile, Lalande, 1982; Robb, Ross, and Shortreed, 1986; Eslami, 2014; Iswandari, 2016; Anggraini, 2018 revealed that indirect feedback strategy showed a greater improvement in accuracy over time. Moreover, it also activates students' internal processing and improves their comprehensiveness of correct forms and structures (Ferris, 2002). In contrast, this study revealed that indirect strategy was assumed to be the least strategy that the students preferred to be employed. They argued that indirect strategy less helpful and motivating compared to other strategies. Roberts (2001) and Chandler (2003) agreed that the indirect strategy might cause knowledge gaining failure as it baffled the students. The unclear and inadequate information provided to the students resulted in incomprehensive knowledge gaining and demotivation in learning. On the other side, Syamsir (2016) and Chung (2015) proposed another perspective that the combination of direct and indirect strategy in the feedback provision played a greater role to students' improvement rather than employing either of the strategies. However, Bauningen (2008) found such a light to the issue. He emphasized that both direct and indirect feedback strategies should be useful for students' improvement if it is deemed applicable to the error treatment and has satisfied the students' expectations and needs.

Another strategy that students were in favor of is metalinguistic. It encouraged the students to analyze deeper and learn more without being lost by the clues provided. Be in accordance, Gholaminia et al. (2014) revealed that the implementation of the metalinguistic strategy facilitates the students' learning process to run more effectively and efficiently. This strategy motivates them to revise their writing draft through the provision of clues that reveal what errors they should avoid and what inappropriate use of language elements they should revise. This activity arises students' sensitivity and awareness of writing skills while doing the writing since they are cultivated to observe their writing.

The following strategy suggested to be applied is the reformulation strategy. This study found that the suggestions of language lexis use enhanced the students to construct more native-like sentences in their writing. They were pleased to get the idea of creating the more natural and academic lexis so that their writing would have a certain quality and their

knowledge might get enriched. This finding is in line with Sanavi (2014) who stated that reformulation strategy outperformed other strategies of written corrective feedback.

Even though direct was preferred most by the students, the mean distinction of one strategy to another strategy is only a little. Thus, it can be concluded that the students appreciate all strategies in the practice. However, based on their language knowledge in writing and expectations, the direct strategy appeared to be the most helpful and useful feedback for their writing improvement. Thus, appreciating that each strategy has its advantages and disadvantages, there should be a clear understanding of how each strategy works for students' knowledge enrichment and writing improvement. In line with this, Ferris and Roberts (2001) also emphasized that regardless of what WCF strategy is used, it results in positive effects on students' future writing drafts.

In terms of the scope of error correction, the focus strategy is considered contributive for the students' writing improvement. The students approved that by correcting only certain errors in their writing, they grasped a clearer understanding of what they did wrong in the writing and felt more encouraged to improve. Besides, the correction intended to focus on crucial errors/mistakes.

Furthermore, as technology has developed, many media can be used for learning as well as the feedback provision through a certain medium is highly possible to be employed (e.g.: electronic dictionary, Microsoft word). However, it was revealed that the students showed no objection whether the feedback is given through electronic devices or mobile phones or directly written on their writing paper.

5. Conclusion

The research participants shared positive perceptions of WCF implementation in the writing classroom. WCF implementation was found facilitating the students in improving their writing skills and language knowledge. Through the provision of WCF, the students are trained to be aware of the mistakes and errors made, what they should avoid, and improve to create good writing. Also, the provision of feedback contributes to reducing students' anxiety and increasing their motivation in learning writing. This shows that most of the time, the WCF provided is practically useful.

Furthermore, the feedback-giving strategy does contribute to students' knowledge enrichment because it enables them to engage with the feedback given. Direct feedback strategy performs as the most effective strategy to improve students' writing skills, followed by metalinguistic, reformulation, and indirect strategy. Through direct strategy, the students can easily grasp and reflect on their mistakes. It is in contrast with indirect strategy, the least strategy that the students prefer, which was claimed to less work on them. It was considered ineffective as it gave no comprehensive feedbacks resulting in students' confusion and demotivation in learning. Further, metalinguistic and reformulation strategies were counted as useful for the students' improvement. Through a metalinguistic strategy, the students are encouraged and guided to analyze their errors and revise it. At the same time, the reformulation strategy performs to help the students create native-like writing.

However, the lecturer's further comments and commands after the provision of the feedback are highly suggested as not all of the feedback is well-received by the students. Moreover, the correction addressed crucial errors only proved to be more effective on students' knowledge enrichment. It was found to be more understandable and worth than correcting all mistakes including the trivial ones.

Furthermore, there are certain limitations to this research that should be considered. First, despite having a quite large number of participants, they came from only two universities and two certain majors that offer writing subjects. The result of this research may not be able to cover a wider and more varied context of students and learning situations. Therefore, the interested researchers in this issue are highly suggested to research a more extensive and varied number of participants. Second, this research is limited only to the written technique of feedback giving. Thus, the interested researchers are recommended to investigate the other feedback-giving technique in writing. Lastly, there might be factors that influence students' perceptions and preferences establishment. The investigation regarding these factors is also interesting to be conducted to get a more thorough sight of the effectiveness of feedback-giving practice.

6. Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

7. Ethics Committee Approval

The author confirms that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country.

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