

The KWB Program: Enhancing Reading Interest and Comprehension to Support Sustainable Development in Early Childhood^[1]Fatia Rosyida, ^[2]Muthmainah,^{[1][2]} Yogyakarta State University^[1]rosyidafatia@gmail.com, ^[2] muthmainnah@uny.ac.id.

Abstract— Reading has essential to support sustainable development through increasing the quality of education. This study explores the effectiveness of the modified KWB (Kurikulum Wajib Baca) Program in enhancing reading interest and reading comprehension among early childhood learners. The program integrates 15-minute daily reading sessions using boardbooks, tailored to the developmental needs of children aged 4–5 years. Conducted as classroom action research over three cycles, the study involved 25 participants and utilized systematic observations and assessments to evaluate two variables: reading interest and comprehension. The findings reveal consistent improvements across all measured indicators. Reading interest increased significantly, with Interest in Books rising from 58% in pretest to 83% in Cycle 3, and Response to Reading Activities improving from 39% to 81%. Reading comprehension also showed marked progress, with the ability answer question about story increasing from 39% in pretest to 81% in Cycle 3, and to Retell Stories increasing from 37 in pretest to 77 in Cycle 3. The program effectively reduced the proportion of students in lower achievement categories while increasing those in higher categories. This study highlights the value of structured reading interventions in fostering reading interest and reading comprehension among young learners. By addressing socio-economic barriers and providing engaging reading materials, the program serves as a practical model for enhancing reading interest and reading comprehension in early childhood education.

Index Terms— Early childhood, literacy, reading interest, reading comprehension, KWB program.

1) INTRODUCTION

Reading has a crucial role in education [1], [2], reading can increase the vocabulary of humans, stimulate creativity, increase critical thinking, and enhance vocabulary [1]. Reading opens up the world, giving more opportunities for knowledge, can allow individuals to understand texts, gain information, perform tasks, and enjoy literature [2]. Reading is a critical activity that has numerous benefits for early childhood. Studies have shown that children who have reading activities, retrieved better results in cognitive tests, have larger brain cortical areas and volumes, and have better mental health function [3], [4]. Therefore, reading has essential to support sustainable development through increasing the quality of education.

Before having reading activities, individuals should have a reading interest. Psychological factors related to reading interest can affect the reading process [5], reading interest having a significant correlation with reading comprehension [6]. That have a correlation with research by Aprilia that reading interest positively influences reading motivation and contributes to better academic outcomes [7]. Reading interest is a crucial thing that can enhance critical thinking and support academic success [8].

Reading interest is crucial for early childhood to build reading skills. This has a correlation with research by Choiriyah, who explains that reading interest in early childhood is the foundation for building literacy skills and cognitive development [9], [10], [11]. Early childhood reading interest is crucial for participatory reading, fostering active, and critical thinking skills in early childhood, and will enhance their literacy skills [12]. In the different research, Mardhashova explains that reading interest during early childhood is crucial for the holistic development, reading activity, and a child's personality [13].

Early childhood reading interests have many issues that are influenced by various factors. Technological distraction has more portion in early childhood reading interest [14], [15]. Besides technological distraction, the role of parents has an impact on reading interest in early childhood. Parents play a critical role in fostering early childhood reading interest by engaging in reading activity [9], [16]. Parents' involvement can lead the reading activity, that influences reading interest in early childhood, thus improving readiness for reading in early childhood [17]. Socioeconomic conditions in parents impact children's reading interest, the study shows that low-income families may not have home libraries, limiting access to children to explore books [18], [19].

Reading interest in early childhood in the form of (1) Interest in books (interested in reading books, and showing books that they like) (2) Response to reading activities (children look like they enjoy listening, and children respond to teachers in reading activities) [10], [20], [21] Reading interest in children also includes (1) Enjoying reading, (2) Believing in their abilities, (3) being able to continue the story that has been read [19], [22].

Reading interest plays a crucial role in the development of reading comprehension skills in early childhood [19], [23]. Children who exhibit high levels of interest in reading are more likely to engage with texts, which enriches their vocabulary and deepens their understanding of content [24], [25], [26]. Oxley and McGeown (2023) found that children with a strong interest in reading scored significantly higher in comprehension assessments compared to their peers with less enthusiasm for reading [27]. This correlation emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that nurtures reading interest from an early age to facilitate optimal literacy development.

Reading comprehension is vital for young children as it forms the foundation for other academic skills [28], [29]. Beyond recognizing letters and words, comprehension enables children to connect new information with prior knowledge, supporting the development of logical and critical thinking skills [29], [30]. According to Gillam et al. (2023), children aged 4–6 who demonstrated strong comprehension abilities also showed significant advancements in speaking and writing skills. The developmental stages of reading comprehension typically begin with letter and word recognition, move on to basic meaning-making, and eventually lead to understanding more complex narratives, aligned with their cognitive and developmental growth [29].

Reading comprehension is defined as the ability to grasp, interpret, and evaluate the meaning contained in written texts [32]. For young children, this skill becomes the foundation for higher-order literacy abilities, including writing and verbal expression. Its primary function is to help children explore the world around them, expand their imagination, and develop social skills through the stories they read [30], [32]. In educational contexts, reading comprehension also underpins other academic domains, such as mathematics and science, which require understanding text-based instructions.

The characteristics of reading comprehension in early childhood can be observed through (1) children's ability to answer questions about a story and (2) retell its content in their own words [29], [30], [33]. Children who demonstrate strong comprehension skills can respond to basic questions like "What happened at the end of the story?" Additionally, they can recount a story's sequence, reflecting a solid grasp of narrative structure.

Observations and assessments conducted by teachers revealed that children aged 4–5 years exhibited low scores in both reading interest and reading comprehension. The data showed that only 6 out of the 25 students demonstrated an interest in books, and 5 out of the 25 students responded to the reading activity, while answering questions from the teacher about the book showed just 3 out of 25 students could answer the questions, nevertheless retelling the book using their own word, the data showed just 1 out of 25 student.

These findings highlight a significant issue: many of these children lack access to personal libraries or reading materials at home. Instead, they are often given mobile phones, which limits their exposure to books and storytelling activities that are crucial for literacy development. This situation is further compounded by the socio-economic background of their families, as most parents come from low-income households where providing educational resources may not be a priority or within their financial means. Such challenges underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to foster reading interest and improve comprehension skills among young learners.

For instance, in the KWB program using boardbooks, children engaged in interactive reading activities and successfully reconstructed stories using visual cues. This indicates their ability to process and internalize storylines, a key indicator of early comprehension development. The KWB (Kurikulum Wajib Baca) program was initially developed by the Surabaya City Government to enhance literacy skills among children aged 7–12 years. The program emphasized structured reading activities, such as a mandatory 30-minute reading session before classroom lessons and free reading during school recess [34]. As a volunteer in 2016, I had the opportunity to directly observe the program's impact on fostering a love for reading among school-aged children. Inspired by this initiative, I adapted the program to suit the unique characteristics and developmental needs of early childhood learners.

In its modified form, the KWB program integrates 15-minute reading sessions before classroom lessons, tailored to the shorter attention spans of younger children. The reading materials used are *boardbooks*, chosen for their durability, vibrant illustrations, and minimal text, making them highly suitable for early readers. The reading topics are aligned with the day's lesson plan, and the teacher takes an active role in reading aloud to the children. During recess, children are encouraged to explore books of their choice under the guidance of their teacher. To reinforce comprehension, teachers engage children with open-ended questions about the story and provide opportunities for them to retell the narrative in their own words. This approach not only fosters literacy skills but also builds confidence and encourages active participation in the learning process.

2) **METHOD**

This research uses classroom action research. Classroom action research research purposes develop some skills in students, who use a new idea in learning activities in the class [35], [36]. Classroom action research (CAR) is a method that is used by teachers to solve problems, address classroom and evaluate the learning process [36], [37].

This research employs the Kemmis & McTaggart model for classroom action research, which follows a cyclical process consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting [36]. The research starts by identifying issues within the classroom to establish a clear focus for improvement. In the planning stage, the teacher collaboratively designs a detailed action plan, including specific learning goals and strategies to achieve them. Next, in the acting phase, the planned teaching methods and learning activities are implemented. During the observation phase, data is collected to monitor the teaching process, classroom interactions, and learning outcomes. Finally, the reflection phase involves analyzing the collected data to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions and identify necessary revisions for improvement [36]. This cycle is repeated for three iterations due to the very low pretest scores; the goal is to reach a minimum success criterion of 75% out of 100% [38]. Repeating the cycle three times ensures continuous development and deeper improvements in the learning process. This is the chart that follows the steps of this research.

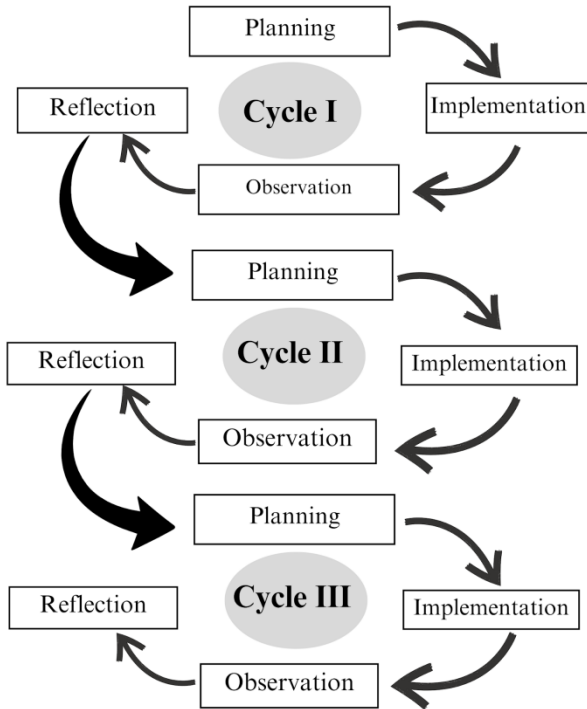


Figure 1. Classroom Action Research Model by Kemmis and McTaggart

The study uses a KWB program for the learning process. The KWB program is a program from the Surabaya City Government for children in Primary School aged 7-12 that requires students to follow a reading activity before learning in class for at least ±30 minutes in the morning [34]. This program makes students read the book personally, and the book materials are regular books that do not follow the lesson plan. In this research, the KWB Program was initially modified and fit to early childhood. The Modified KWB Program required the student to follow a reading activity before learning in the class for at least 15 minutes in the morning. The Modified KWB activity for this program is reading aloud with a teacher who reads the book in front of the class. The teacher uses a board book every time they read the book to students, and the materials of the board book follow the lesson plan. Every Saturday, after the gross motor activity, children have a chance to read a book with the teacher for longer than usual. This program has a class setting, the class has a corner that provides a board book that is used in the week, a week in the school is 6 days, and the board book on the corner is 6. The board book is replaced every week according to the theme of the learning plan. This program is expected to increase reading interest and reading comprehension in early childhood.

Research Participant

The participants of this research are children attending a kindergarten (TK) located in a rural area, where the majority of families have a low average income. This context is significant as it may influence the learning environment and outcomes, making it essential to tailor the classroom action research accordingly. The participants of this research are 25 children, 4-5 years old, at TK PKK Jatigede 1, who are children at Kelompok A. The participants in this research were one class with an implemented reading program and using board books. This research aims to increase reading interest in early childhood with the reading program and by using board books.

Instruments

This study uses an assessment instrument with a checklist to evaluate children's abilities in two main variables: *reading interest* and *reading comprehension*. The assessment is conducted by observing children's behavior during the reading program, asking targeted questions, and evaluating how children engage with and comprehend the reading materials provided.

For the first variable, *reading interest*, the instrument focuses on two indicators: (1) Interest in books, which is observed through children's enthusiasm for reading books and their tendency to select and show books that they like, and (2) Response to reading activities, indicated by how children enjoy listening during reading sessions and actively respond to teachers during reading activities [10], [20], [21].

For the second variable, *reading comprehension*, the instrument assesses two key characteristics: (1) The ability to answer questions about a story, which reflects children's understanding of the content, and (2) The ability to retell the story in their own words, indicating their ability to recall and reconstruct the narrative structure [29], [30], [33]. These indicators are assessed using a Likert scale from 1 (poor), 2 (fair), 3 (good), to 4 (very good) to measure the extent of children's engagement and comprehension, ensuring that the evaluation captures the depth of their learning process within the program. The 4-point Likert scale was intentionally chosen to avoid a neutral middle option, encouraging clearer and more decisive responses that reflect the presence or absence of specific reading behaviors and comprehension skills. This scale offers an optimal balance by providing enough response variation to differentiate levels of engagement without overwhelming young children or observers with excessive choices. This scale is applied consistently across all stages of the program: Pretest, Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and Cycle 3. Assessing at each stage allows for systematic tracking of progress and provides quantitative data to analyze changes in reading interest, response to activities, question-answering ability, and story retelling skills. This methodical approach facilitates a clear understanding of how the KWB Program fosters development in early childhood literacy over time.

3) **RESULT**

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the modified KWB program to improving reading interest and reading comprehension among early childhood learners. The findings are based on observations, assessments, and interactions conducted throughout the program, focusing on two main variables: reading interest and reading comprehension. These results reflect the impact of structured reading activities using board books and interactive methods tailored to the developmental needs of children aged 4-5 years.

The data were collected through systematic observations of children's behavior during the reading sessions, responses to questions, and their ability to retell stories. The assessments provided quantitative insights into the progress of each variable, enabling a deeper understanding of how the program influenced the children's engagement with reading and their comprehension abilities. The assessment was conducted 6 days after treatment from the KWB program. The following sections detail the findings for each variable, highlighting key trends and their implications.

Table 1. Mean score of reading interest and reading comprehension in each cycle

Cycle	Interest in Books (%)	Response to Reading Activities (%)	Answering Questions (%)	Retelling the Story (%)
Pretest	58	39	39	37
Cycle 1	73	70	71	63
Cycle 2	77	75	77	70
Cycle 3	83	81	81	77

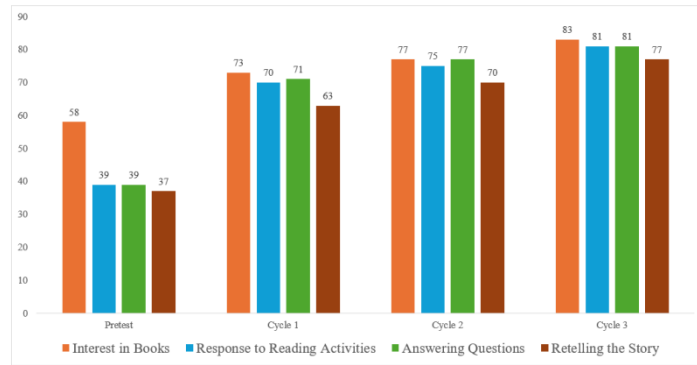


Figure 2. Mean score of reading interest and reading comprehension in each cycle

Based on the data from pretest and three cycles of implementing the KWB's Program Using Boardbook, significant improvements were observed across all measured indicators: Interest in Books, Response to Reading Activities, Answering Questions, and Retelling the Story. These results underline the effectiveness of the program in fostering a love for reading and improving literacy skills among early childhood learners.

The pretest showed interest in Books in 58%, the child's response to reading Activities was lower, with only 39%. The answering questions indicator displayed a moderate achievement score at 39%, demonstrating some reading comprehension ability among children participating and being able to answer questions about the text. and retelling the story at 37%. These figures provided an important baseline, reflecting the starting point of children's engagement with reading before the intervention. In the first cycle, children's interest in books was recorded at a 73% increase, at least 15% from the score at pretest, indicating that the program successfully captured the children's curiosity and motivation to explore books. Their response to reading activities was 65%, there was a 26% difference from the score at pretest, showing that children became more enthusiastic and active in participating in the sessions. Their ability to answer questions increased by at least 20% from the pretest at 71%, signalling better comprehension of the stories, and their ability to retell stories at 63%, at least increased by 22% from the score at pretest %, illustrating growth in narrative recall and expression.

By the second cycle, notable progress was made in all areas. Interest in books increased to 77% increased at least 4% from pretest, and responses to reading activities also improved to 70%. Their ability to answer questions increased to 77%, while their storytelling skills reached 70%.

The third cycle showed even more remarkable improvements, demonstrating the program's sustained impact. Interest in books climbed to 84%, reflecting a significant increase in children's enthusiasm for reading. Responses to reading activities soared to 77%, indicating a heightened engagement and willingness to interact with reading materials. Answering questions also improved substantially, reaching 82%, showcasing a marked improvement in children's comprehension and critical thinking skills. Lastly, storytelling skills peaked at 75%, indicating a significant leap in their ability to recall and narrate stories with greater detail and accuracy. Overall, the consistent upward trends across all cycles demonstrate the success of the KWB's Program Using Boardbook in enhancing early childhood learners' interest in reading and literacy abilities. The largest gains were observed in Retelling the Story and Answering Questions, reflecting the program's effectiveness in strengthening comprehension and storytelling skills, which are critical components of literacy. These findings validate the program's approach in using engaging and interactive board books to foster a positive reading culture among young children.

The distribution of students across achievement levels, as shown in Table 2, reveals significant shifts in reading interest categories throughout the program implementation.

Table 2. Distribution of students' reading interest achievements

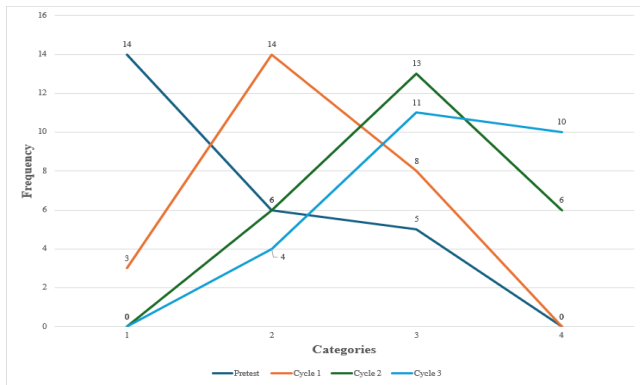


Figure 3. Distribution of students' reading interest achievements

The distribution of students' reading interest achievements across three cycles demonstrates consistent improvement, particularly in reducing the proportion of students in the Poor category from 14 out of 25 children in the Pretest to 0 out of 25 children in Cycle 3. The Fair category also decreased from 14 out of 25 children in Cycle 1 to 4 in Cycle 3, while the Good category saw a notable increase from 5 out of 25 children in the pretest to 11 out of 25 children in Cycle 3. Meanwhile, the Very Good category remained increase in 0 out of 25 children in the pretest to 10 out of 25 children in cycle 3, indicating that the intervention was effective in maintaining high achievers while steadily uplifting students from lower categories to higher levels of reading interest.

The distribution of students across achievement levels, as shown in Table 3, reveals significant shifts in reading comprehension categories throughout the program implementation.

Table 3. Distribution of students' reading comprehension achievements

Categories	Frequency (f)			
	Pretest	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
1	17	1	1	0
2	6	10	6	5
3	2	14	15	14
4	0	1	3	6

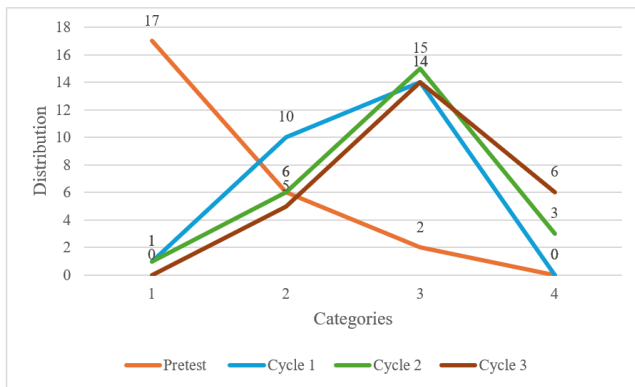


Figure 3. Distribution of students' reading comprehension achievements

The distribution of students' reading comprehension achievements across three cycles shows significant progress, particularly in reducing the Poor category from 17 out of 25 students in the Pretest to 1 out of 25 students in Cycle 3. The Good category demonstrated steady growth from 2 out of 25 in Pretest to 14 in Cycle 3, while the Very Good category showed the most notable improvement, increasing from 0 out of 25 to 6 out of 25 students. These results highlight the program's effectiveness in enhancing students' reading comprehension, as more students moved into higher achievement categories while lower categories diminished across all cycles.

The data on both reading interest and reading comprehension achievements across three cycles highlight the effectiveness of the program in enhancing students' literacy skills. There was a consistent reduction in the Poor and Fair categories, accompanied by significant growth in the Good and Very Good categories. These improvements demonstrate that the intervention successfully fostered higher levels of engagement and comprehension in reading among students. The program proved effective in not only maintaining the performance of high achievers but also in uplifting students from lower achievement levels to higher ones, affirming its role as a valuable tool for developing early literacy skills.

4) DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that KWB's Program effectively enhanced reading interest among early childhood students. This success aligns with Justice which explain an assertion about the importance of providing quality reading materials in early childhood education [39]. The program's approach of using board books, which were changed weekly according to learning themes, proved particularly effective in maintaining children's engagement with reading materials.

The progressive improvement in students' reading interests supports Choiriyah et al. Findings regarding the importance of structured reading programs in early childhood education [9]. The significant reduction in students showing poor reading interest, from 12% to 4%, demonstrates the program's effectiveness in addressing varying levels of reading engagement. This improvement was particularly noteworthy given the initial challenges of limited access to reading materials, as highlighted by Boja & Achim Regarding socioeconomic barriers to reading development [18].

The enhancement in children's response to reading activities, from 39% in the Pretest to 81% in cycle 3, reflects Muniz & França research on the importance of participatory reading in fostering active engagement [12]. Students not only showed improved listening skills but also demonstrated greater enthusiasm in participating in reading discussions. This engagement was particularly significant given the concerns raised by Depalina & Matondang about technological distractions in early childhood education [15].

The improvement in students' ability to retell stories, increasing from 37% to 77%, supports Y. Sun et al. findings about the cognitive benefits of early childhood reading activities. This progress was facilitated by the program's structured approach and consistent implementation, which provided regular opportunities for students to practice and develop their narrative skills [3].

The success of KWB's Program can be attributed to its comprehensive approach that addresses multiple aspects of reading development. The daily 15-minute reading sessions, combined with a weekly rotation of age-appropriate board books, created a consistent and engaging reading environment. This structured approach effectively supported children's natural curiosity and learning processes, while the integration with learning themes helped maintain relevance and interest [40].

Perhaps most significantly, the program demonstrated that well-designed reading interventions can successfully address socioeconomic challenges in early childhood education. By providing quality reading materials and structured reading experiences in the classroom, the program effectively bridged the gap for children who might have limited access to books at home [41].

5) CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the modified KWB Program significantly enhances early childhood literacy by improving both reading interest and comprehension. The data showed consistent progress across three cycles, with reading interest distribution increasing from 58% in the pretest to 83% in Cycle 3 for the *Interest in Books* indicator. Similarly, the ability to retell stories improved from 37% in the pretest to 77% in Cycle 3, reflecting substantial growth in comprehension skills. These findings affirm the effectiveness of structured interventions tailored to the developmental needs of young learners.

The program's success lies in its thoughtful design, which included 15-minute daily reading sessions using board books, aligned with weekly learning themes. By providing age-appropriate materials and fostering teacher-led discussions, the program created a highly engaging reading environment. This approach not only boosted students' enthusiasm for reading but also addressed socio-economic barriers, as evidenced by the reduction in the Poor category for reading comprehension from 17 out of 25 students to 0 out of 25 students.

Overall, the modified KWB Program is a practical and effective model for promoting literacy development in early childhood. The combination of interactive reading materials, structured routines, and teacher involvement proved successful in uplifting students from lower achievement levels and maintaining the performance of high achievers. These results provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to design inclusive and impactful literacy programs, especially for children facing limited access to reading resources.

ACKNOWLEDGE

This research is funded by PPAPT, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, and LPDP (Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education Agency), the Ministry of Finance, Indonesia.

In this research, I express my gratitude to my beloved mother, Sri Mujayanik, S.Pd., who is my teacher to taught my student in kindergarten. And she is my inspiration to apply this research in her classes. I'm glad to have a lecturer like Dr. Muthmainah, S.Pd, M.Pd., who always supported me in writing this research. And I express my gratitude to PPAPT Kemendikhsaintek and LPDP for giving me the chance to get my Master's Degree while Scholarship.

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