





ASSESSMENT COVER PAGE AND DECLARATION

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The COVID-19 Pandemic: On the Effectiveness of Special Education Instruction in the Philippines

Abstract:

The Philippines, like every other country, is unprepared for the sort of cataclysmic disaster that the Co Vid19-virus has brought about. With no set timetable for resumption, the Philippine government has ordered a nationwide emergency remote education program employing the internet, modular, and immersive learning. Special education students especially succeed with routine, encouragement and personal interactions, which were not made possible during the shutdown of the physical schools. The subject of the effectiveness and quality of learning of the Special Education program raised awareness t o t h e field o f education int this time. The issue of how to provide and deliver quality education to children with disabilities remains a difficu lties. Future study should assess the success of emergency remote education in the Philippines based on the experiences of SPEd students, instructors, and parents.

Introduction

The sudden spread of the corona virus 19, also tagged as CoVid19-virus has an effect on every area of human life around the world, including tourism, athletics, gatherings, transportation, economy, education, and politics. Most countries around the world have temporarily shut down education programs to control the transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigate outbreaks, affecting 1.2 billion students globally, including more than 28 million students in the Philippines (UNESCO, 2020). The Philippine government has mandated a national emergency remote education program using internet, modular, and immersive learning with no definite date of resumption. The Department of Education (DepEd) is the Philippine government's administrative department in charge of maintaining, fostering diversity in, and enhancing basic education efficiency. It is the

computed depending on their actual academic standing. Furthermore, both CHED (Commission on Higher Education) and the Department of Education (DepEd) will use a variety of learning delivery methods, including but not limited to face-to-face, blended learning, and online learning. In emergency situation like this, the students with special needs are not an exemption. In developing countries like the Philippines, children with disabilities are considered one of the most marginalized groups (UNICEF, 2017). There is a lack of documentation on their needs, a shortage of trained providers, and information on the types of programs that are being undertaken for disabled children (UNICEF, 2017). Data from the Department of Education showed that more than 5 million Filipino children with disabilities nationwide, only 1.4 percent or more than 71,000 non-graded learners were enrolled for the upcoming school year as of September (DepEd, 2020). Emergency Remote Education has been announced to substitute physical classrooms for students all over the Philippines, including special education students, in order to maintain learning continuity. However, teachers, parents, and students in the Philippines have faced a variety of dangers, difficulties, and obstacles as a result of the adoption of ERE (Tria, 2020). Learning quality and academic achievement, especially for students with special needs that need more physical attention and instruction from teachers, may be severely impacted. Experts on Special Education have cautioned against "regression," which is widespread among students with special needs (Saida, 2020). Children who are neurotypical, or who do not have any academic or behavioral disabilities, are less likely to relapse even after taking extended periods from school as they have more options to continue learning. For several educators, learners, and parents in the Philippines, obtaining academic education from home could be a difficult task. Remote education could present obstacles to educate the children with special needs. Factors like parents' education, living situation, distractions, individual needs and teaching strategies could be utmost a barrier to the quality of learning.

Background / Review of the Literature:

As of June 2021, Philippines has recorded 1,000,052 million infections, 26, 884 deaths and 1,000, 044 million recoveries according to the Department of Health (DOH, 2021). The Department of Education (DepED) has declared that there will be no face-to-face class until further noticed and this includes, Special Education. Students and teachers all over the Philippines are studying and working from home these days due to the neighborhood lockdown and quarantine. The issue of how to offer and provide high-quality education to students with disabilities remains unanswered.

Emergency Remote Education and Special Education

Emergency Remote Education (*ERE*) is about surviving in a time of crisis with all resources available, including offline/online (*Bozkurt et al, 2020*). The success of the program implementations depends on the stakeholders, instructional materials, facilities, equipment, parents, educators and government support (*Avramidis, & Norwich, 2002*). Distance learning does not apply to the pedagogical practices during this pandemic since it is a "planned activity and its implementation is grounded in theoretical and practical knowledge which is specific to the field and its nature (*Rabara, 2017*). Special education students especially succeed with routine, encouragement and personal interactions, which weren't possible during the closures of the physical schools. The question of the effectiveness and quality of learning of the Special Education program raised awareness to the field of education in this time. The challenges remain on how to provide and deliver quality education to the students with disabilities.

ERE and SPED Teachers

Changes imply to the introduction of something unusual, which includes something that is distinct

face opposition (*Flamholtz and Randle, 2008*). Educators all over the world are undergoing unprecedented changes due to CoVid19 pandemic. SPEd teachers in the Philippines in public and private schools, are experiencing difficulties because of many factors like lack of technological skills to prepare their lessons, lack of financial support from the government, communication with parents and students and lack of pedagogical training strategies to deliver the lessons. Other studies suggested that psychological, personal, school-related and organizational factors influenced teachers' effectiveness to educational changes. Stress, accumulated fatigue, mental exhaustion, personal problems can also negatively affect their performance and level of satisfaction (*Duraku and Hoxha, 2020*).

ERE and SPED Parents and Students

In remote education, parental participation is increased, particularly for children with disabilities (Smith et al. 2016). Parental support is the most important factor in the academic success of children with special needs in remote education for the role of parents are now shifted as facilitators of learning such as being involved in the children's activities, setting up the physical environment for remote learning and physically attending the sped students needs. Studies shows that parental involvement has been proven to have many benefits for children's education, several potential challenges can hinder effective parental engagement in remote learning. Several reports also found that parental involvement practices will help the children with disabilities in remote education such as come upon effective learning tools and resources, preparing and structuring classes and giving instructions, self-imposed assessment, providing instructions; adjusting activities to fit children's needs; teaching and supporting problem-solving, monitoring and reporting progress; and offering technological support (Burdette and Greer 2014; Smith et al. 2016).

ERE and IEP

The Individual Education Program or IEP is a written plan drawn up to outline special accommodations and modifications within the educational environment for each special education

student (*IDEA*, 2020). This plan's focus is structuring the elements that drive the educational process -- instruction and assessment -- so that the individual can benefit from the educational environment. Without this specialize educational plan, the student's disability might interfere educational efforts (*Rabara*, 2020). Because of the parents' level of involvement in school support and the likelihood of teachers visiting special education students and their parents face-to-face, the IEP assessment in the CoVid19 situation is undefined (*Toquero*, 2020).

ERE and Students' Assessment

Special education students assessment were designed to be supervised in person, physically sitting one-on-one with the teacher. Remarkable times like covid19 pandemic makes it more challenging for the special education teachers to assess the students. Under some timeline constraints, the need to begin evaluating special education students can be challenging using systematic testing methods due to health and safety issues, as well as a restricted capacity to perform tests accurately (*Toquero*, 2020).

Method and Designs:

The researcher has a keen interest in the emergency remote education in the Philippines regarding the Special Education system. Many factors affect the quality of remote education in the Philippines as discussed beforehand. The researcher used qualitative approach and thematic analysis in analyzing the data. The researcher has drawn data from a very small and specific population. Data were gathered from (N-6) SPED Teachers (N-6) Parents of SPED students (N-6) special education students about the effectiveness of the remote learning of the special education in the Philippines. The interviews were done online and face to face appointment. Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires and self-made interview questions administered to (N-6) SPED Teachers and (N-6) SPED parents and (N-6) special education students selected from different parts of the Philippines.

Participants: SPEd Teachers from all over the Philippines who participated in the semistructured questionnaires

SPEd Teachers	Location	Age	Years of Teaching	School
SPEd Teacher I	Bulacan, Philippines	43	9 years of SPED teaching, 10 years GenEd	Public school
SPED Teacher II,	Manila, Philippines,	44,	6 years SPED teaching, 7 years GenEd	Public school
SPED Teacher III,	Manila City, Philippines,	34,	6 years SPED teaching, 3 years GenEd	Private Center
SPED Teacher IV,	Bataan, Philippines,	44,	3 years SPED teaching, 8 years GenEd	Private Center
SPED Teacher V,	Manila, Philippines,	38,	8 SPED Teaching, 4 years GenEd	Public school
SPED Teacher VI,	Cavite, Philippines,	40,	12 years SPED Teacher	Private-owned center

Parents of (N-10) SPED Students and (N-10) SPED Students

Parents	Age - occupation	SPED Students	Age
I - Mother	27 - housewife	I	6.5
II - Mother	37 - salesperson	II	6.8
III - Mother	35 - housewife	III	7
IV - Mother	23 - accountant	IV	6.6
V - Mother	39 - housewife	V	6
VI - Mother	51 - housewife	VI	6.5

Semi-structured questionnaires was given through Physical Interview and phone video and voice recording, notebook and pen.

TEACHERS	PARENTS
1. What source of materials do you use for Emergency Remote Education?	1. How do you teach the lessons to your SPED child during this time?
2. How do you distribute the lessons during the COVID-19	2. How do you manage to receive the proper instructions from the teachers during this time?
3. How do you develop a teacher- student relationship without physical	3. How does your child develop trust to his teacher without physical contact?
4. What are the challenges in your teaching strategies during this	4. What are the challenges you face in delivering the lesson to your child?
5. What are the advantages you face professionally and personally during this time, in regards with the learning development of the students?	5. What are the factors that affect the learning development of your child during this time?
6. What are the hindrances for students learning development	6. What are the things we can do to combat the hindrances for the child's learning?

7. What challenges do you see in the future pandemic in regards with the SPED education system in the Philippines?	7. What challenges do you see in the future pandemic in regards with the SPED education system in the Philippines?
8. How do you assess each students during this time?	8. Do you see any evidence of learning from your child during this time?

Semi-structured interview questions for N-6 SPEd students.

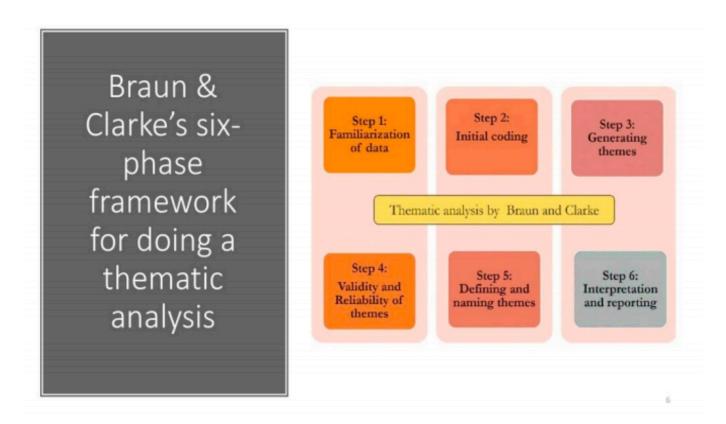
- 1. What is your favorite activity with teacher in online class?
- 2. Do you miss school? What do you miss from school?
- 3. What is your favorite activity with your parent?
- 4. Do you miss your friends in school? Which friend do you miss in school? What activities do you with him/her that you miss?
- 5. What is CoVid19? What can we do avoid the virus?

The qualitative approach was used to collect participant comments and data in a descriptive and persuasive language (Creswell, 2013). Selected number of participants were asked about their perceptions, experiences, challenges and strategies to provide quality learning and educational support for the students with special education needs during the pandemic. The current situation left the special education teachers an unfamiliar situation as it is necessary for them to provide different learning materials depending on their students with physical and developmental disabilities. The researcher proposed a semi-structured questionnaire and follow-up interview with N-6 special education teachers, N-6 special education parents and students as the participants for this study. All participants are licensed teachers who are teaching in the elementary general education for eight to ten years and as special education for five to ten years. The N-2 SPEd teachers are from public schools and catering about 12-20 students with developmental disabilities. The N-2 Sped teachers

are from private schools with 10 students with special needs, N-2 Sped teachers own a private SPEd centers with 10-12 students. The N-6 parents of the N-6 sped students volunteered to be interviewed with their children. The N-6 SPEd students are between 6-8 years of physical age and recommended students of the interviewed N-6 SPEd teachers. Each of the N-6 sped teachers are teaching their students altogether in a special education classroom. The students included a mix of disabilities in conventional classrooms such as children with hearing impairment, visual impairment, autism, ADHD, down syndrome and intellectual disability in one class. Two public schools are non-special education centers, but the schools have provisioned for special education classrooms with teachers who are trained to cater to students with special educational needs and developmental disabilities. Four schools are centers specializing in students with special needs. The study was conducted between the months of January to March 2021. A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for this study to gather the data. The questionnaire was composed of eight questions that asked the participant's experiences, discernment, demand, challenges, and strategies to deal with the educational needs of students with special educational needs and disabilities amidst pandemic. The researcher informed the participants of the nature of the study. The N-3 SPEd educators were set for physical interview in the respective schools and centers. N-6 parents and SPEd students participated in the physical interview set in their place of stay. The participants were also given a consent form to ask for their voluntary participation in the study and were informed of their rights as participants. Eight and a half weeks were given for the whole process until the instrument was finished through Facebook messengers, phone recording via physical interview. For data analysis, the researcher utilized the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher applied thematic analysis in this qualitative research by describing its procedures and processes. Thematic analysis is a method of qualitative research that examines classifications and presents themes (patterns) that are relevant to the results. Thematic research makes use of data from a variety

of sources to come up with explanations (Boyatzis, 1998). The researcher created a diagram to illustrate Braun and Clarke's process (Figure 1) that shows the six phases guidelines of thematic analysis. It should be used concerning the research questions and the available data. Thematic Analysis was considered the most appropriate for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations because it provides a systematic element to data analysis. It allows the researcher to associate analysis of a theme and confer accuracy and intricacy to enhance the research's study. Thematic Analysis allows understanding the potential of any issue more widely (Marks & Yardley, 2004). By using thematic analysis, it is possible to analyze a large amount of data from multiple participants and synthesized those into a meaningful account (Boyatzis, 1998). Thus, the researcher utilized qualitative thematic analysis to investigate the experiences and perceptions of special education teachers, parents and students.

Figure 1.



Results and Discussion

Analyzing the information collected from SPEd teachers, parents and SPEd students, participants provided precise and repeated responses (*Fig 2*) in regards on the Effectiveness of the Special Education Instruction in the Philippines. As a result, the theme was evaluated and developed from the data employed.

SPED TEACHERS	SPED PARENTS AND STUDENTS
Parents' Involvement	Physical Environment
Teaching Materials (Internet, Printing)	Teaching Strategies (Technology Knowledge)
Lack of Government Support	Individual Needs

Figure 2.

Hindrances on the Effectiveness of Emergency Remote Education of the Special Education System

Parents' Involvement

N-5 SPEd teachers who took part in the interview listed parental engagement as one of the barriers to remote education. One thing to remember is the education of the parents. Some parents seem to be unaware of their new job as a teacher, their duties, and the degree of involvement expected of them. (Borup et al. 2015; Smith 2016). N-3 parents mentioned that they were not educated how to academically teach their children, how to tame them when they throw "tantrums" and how can they engage the sped children with the modules and online class. This level of engagement may be more challenging in large families and those with low incomes. Further, in practice, this role entails a greater time commitment and a considerable level of expertise to support children which some

parents may not possess. Adding the role of "teacher" to parenting may also influence family dynamics, leading to frustration for parents and children (Smith et al. 2016) and, eventual conflict (Borup et al. 2015).

Teaching Materials (Internet, Printing, Individual Modules)

Philippines is tagged as having one of the worst internet connections in Asia (Rappler, 2017). As we pass through about in the pandemic era, a stable internet connection is one of the most important element to quality remote education. N-2 parents stated that "We have a regular online class every Monday, Wednesday and Friday - but the internet connection really give us frustration especially to our children. This is a 40-min class in each subject, to get inside the online classroom takes half hour already". Meanwhile, students with disabilities who live in low-income households are unlikely to have an available computer or any technology gadget at home. Due to lack of or noneinternet access to some students, they may not be able to take advantage of the opportunities in remote education like Youtube Educational Videos, Social Media communications, search engines and accessing other academic website. In the Philippines, public SPEd teachers devote their time expanding DepEd's modular learning to conceptualize the learning needs of each of their students through written materials and supplies. N-4 SPEd teachers from public schools commented, "The modules are printed from the Department of Education, but we have to modify them to our students' needs. Another child's progress could not be the same as anyone else's". N-3 special education parents reported, "We have to go to the teachers every Monday to get the modules." Most parents of special education students live in flooded area, so it's really a hassle to go to the school, give back the printed modules and get another printed modules from teachers. It takes us three hours to get there if its high tide season".

Physical Environment

The World Health Organization (*WHO*) has urged educational organizations around the world to use distance learning to ensure that schooling continues when schools close physically (2020). External

opportunity to partake in academic programs may be harmed by physical school closures and a lack of in-person contact especially for the children with disabilities. According to studies, many students who are restricted at home may experience stress and anxiety, which may impair their ability to focus on their schoolwork, especially students with learning disabilities who may need more space and time to cultivate learning in their own pace (Tria, 2020). In the Philippine setting, sixty-five percent of families in the country are living in housing units with a floor area of 10 to 49 square meters (PSA, 2018). Studies concluded that geographic location has a significant difference with their readiness for remote education (Alea, Fabrea, Roldan and Faroogi, 2020). N-6 SPEd parents and N-2 SPEd students mentioned the physical environment affect their study time. N-1 SPEd parent said "We live in a 40 sqm house. I have six kids and four of them are having modular classes. I have one child with special needs and the distractions should be seriously taken. A neighbor will call "Hey, can I borrow a shovel for a while? Then I will stop teaching and get the shovel. Noises are everywhere. And that makes my teaching job difficult. How can I grab his attention again? I also cannot make an encouraging classroom setting because, how can I buy those paper materials if I can't even afford a kilo of rice?". N-1 SPEd teacher said "We are informing the parents to make a daily routine for their child to make the child more familiar with academic stuff but factors like weather (weather is very hot and only one fan to share with a family of six), their duties as parents (finding daily food/allowance for the whole family), taking care of their children and other personal problems make it difficult for them to focus on the education of the special child".

Individual Needs

Students with disabilities need a curriculum and a learning space that is contextualized to their needs. SPEd teachers are very much in-touch with their pupils, but without physical interaction, it is impossible to monitor their concerns.. N-2 parent said "I remember that our Municipal in Hagonoy, Bulacan has given us seminars and lectures on how to take basic care of our children with special

needs but to engage them in the educational activities and module-question-and-answer portion is a different story." SPEd teachers can cater the needs of each students and implement the lesson plan in purpose. N-6 SPEd parents stated that "we are not trained to teach them academics - yet we have to - this time we must cooperate to support their educational needs but we are not sure if we are getting it right".

Teaching Strategies

Until now, SPEd teachers have been searching for options for workshops on how to involve students with disabilities in online or modular learning in aims to assist with emergency remote education. In the Philippines, special education teachers extends a hands-on approach in teaching their students with disabilities, the situation right now makes it impossible to do so. Hence why, children with special educational needs and disabilities face the most educational repercussions, in addition to being deprived of basic health care during the pandemic. (Jalali et al., 2020; Safta-Zecheria, 2020). Plus, teachers need to have an individualized approach through remote education while taking into account the different disabilities of their students. There are only 3, 050 elementary-level special education teachers in the country based on a draft report of the Department of Education in 2017-2018 (National Council on Disability Affairs, 2020). These teachers managed multiple disabilities in a traditional special education class before the pandemic. They even lack the advanced skills mainly needed to supervise their students with special educational needs and disabilities, as they have temporarily moved to emergency remote education. (Toquero, 2020). All SPEd teachers asserted that nobody is prepared in this kind of emergency situation. "In a traditional classroom, we pay very little attention to educational technologies. We are still educating the students with special needs with paper crafts and crayons. In Professional Development (PD) seminars, little did we tackle about 21st Century Classrooms and most especially emergency remote education." N-5 SPEd teachers stated that "We believe that there will be a learning gap - and learning loss - because of the pandemic. And it is understandable that it is inevitable. We will feel it

if not sooner than later. Teaching special education students takes professional and personal involvement - they need someone with authority to teach, care and accept them as they are."

Lack of Government Support

Every Filipino citizen should have connection to the provision of the Philippine government during this burdensome situation due to pandemic especially the people with disabilities. (Toquero, 2020) N-2 SPEd teacher expressed that "We've heard that in Thailand, the government is giving free gadget to the students with disabilities because of the remote education. I also hope that our government can allot a budget to our public school sped students for an electronic gadget to support their remote learning." The special education teachers experienced educational disruptions related to module development, stakeholder communication, remote location, and monetary allocation. N-5 Parents said "Our voices are unheard during this time. Our children needs more attention than the normal children that can understand, response and connect with the world. Parents can leave them unsupervised but ours cannot survive without a guide. I hope that the government or even our local municipal can provide us financial assistance for our children's remote learning." There are a lot of educational website available online and children with disabilities can benefit from it.

Suggested Action Plan of the SPEd teachers

Therefore, the researcher and the interviewed SPED teachers formulated a plan to recommend content alternatives. The following suggested action plan is derived from the teachers' experience, perception and awareness regarding the pandemic situation on education system.

(1) **Increasing the usage of instructional technology in classrooms.** In the post-pandemic era, N-6 SPEd teachers insisted to advance the use of instructional technology in the classroom. "They should include more of technology subjects in the curriculum. We are going that way. The students with special needs discover themselves in this manner, personalize their quest, and discover that the world in a big place. They profit a lot from acquiring technology according to their learning interests". According to the findings of a study (*Asuncion et al., 2012*), making

social media accessible to students with disabilities will help increase basic awareness in the education field. The findings revealed that people with disabilities will use social media sites like YouTube and Facebook for personal and educational reasons given the proper guidance and instructions from the teachers.

- (2) Strengthening research and development. The Department of Education in the Philippines has announced about their *Basic Education Research Fund (BERF)* program on April 2021. (*DepEd, 2021*). N-6 SPEd teachers concluded that additional educational services are needed to ensure that special education thrives in the mid-pandemic, post-pandemic, and next-pandemic eras. "We need be prepared through the help of researchers and program and curriculum developers. All educators should support each other so that the next generation will continue to thrive whatever unpleasant global situation may come." There is a stronger need for baseline statistics as well as peer-reviewed and published studies into how emerging technology can help learners with disabilities. The study should concentrate on the feasibility of therapies, services, and educational placements for disabled children (*Hornby, 2015*).
- (3) Advancing teachers development in technology. SPEd teachers' technological expertise should be regarded as the "new normal standard" for all educational institutions. N-4 SPEd teachers said "We should be tackling 21st century classrooms and not traditional classrooms in our Professional Development seminars". We should have a mentality that is prepared for the future. First and foremost, we are educators of the future and our next generation of leaders". A study stresses the importance of technological acceptance in education as a means to mitigate the effects of Coronavirus and other potential pandemics in schools (*Onvema*, et.al, 2020).
- (4) Educating parents as their role as teachers. N-4 SPEd teachers stated "It is very important that parents who have children with disabilities should at least know the basic condition of their children and know how to get their attention to learn and interpret something. We should also educate the parents." Parents must be educated in using assistive technologies such that students

can begin to learn using that are now accessible. Word printers, proofreading systems, spell-checking programs, voice recognition, and other suggested tools may also help students with disabilities. (Abbot, 2007)

(5) **Post-pandemic plan.** N-6 SPEd teachers and parents agreed that our government should impose a post-pandemic educational plan. They should fund research departments to conduct a visionary implementation about a standardized physical classroom, enhance quality learning plan, fund distribution and so on. The government should continue to encourage the building of the educational knowledge superhighway, consider providing standardized home-based teaching/learning facilities to teachers and students, conduct online teacher preparation, include the implementation of major online education in the national strategic plan, and support empirical research into online education, including education to benefit the children with disabilities (*Zhang et al., 2020, p. 1*).

Limitation

The researcher only interviewed six SPED teachers and parents, as well as SPED children who can provide valuable insight into the learning situation of special education emergency remote education. The study's findings cannot be applied to all special education teachers. This study is also limited to the perceptions and experiences of SPED educators in the Luzon Area, Philippines with a time-limit face to face interview due to prolonged home quarantine. Other factors, such as the experiences and assessment of the learners themselves, were not taken into account in the study. Finally, because the study used a face-to-face interview with a semistructured questionnaire that limited interaction for investigating the teacher and parentss' responses, the researcher's data analysis was also constrained.

Significance and Conclusion

Teachers, parents, and students face difficulties in the CoVid19 period in terms of educational needs

students with disabilities, the Philippine government, teachers, parents, students, and the society must collaborate. This research has institutional ramifications, such as the development of a needs evaluation survey to determine the basic needs of students with special needs. Future research should evaluate the experiences of SPEd students, teachers and parents on the effectiveness of emergency remote education in the Philippines.

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