

Cultivating Critical and Creative Thinking of Nursing Students in the New Normal

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Abstract – *The pandemic has resulted in the abrupt introduction of online classes, and students are adjusting, which affects their thinking skills. This study aimed to explore the critical and creative thinking of nursing students in the new normal. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used without introducing treatment. The informants agreed on all of the indicators provided. The paper went through an ethics review, and a letter of approval was sent to the Adviser, Department Chair and Dean. Open-ended questionnaires were utilized in focus group discussions conducted among 13 nursing students from Lyceum of the Philippines University Batangas. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, ensuring adherence to ethical considerations. Colaizzi's methodology was used in analyzing data using inductive reasoning. It was found out that 1st and 2nd students are still actively developing their thinking skills, while 3rd year struggle to do so. The researchers concluded that their critical and creative thinking was centered on their functionality in coping with challenges and accomplishing course requirements. The volume of activities influences students' learning pace, leading to difficulties grasping concepts and knowledge. Finally, the researchers created the Puppet Model of Critical and Creative Thinking Development that elaborated the challenges encountered by students and the learning modalities they utilize. Their capability to adapt leads to the distinction between two types of learning: functional and inconvenient. This model and other recommendations were developed so that educators and learners can devise solutions to improve their thinking skills.*

Keywords – *Creative Thinking, Critical Thinking, New Normal, Nursing*

INTRODUCTION

The sudden shift from traditional learning to pure online setup impacted the education system in the entire world due to COVID-19 pandemic. Education has changed drastically, and e-learning has risen dramatically, with teaching being carried out remotely and on digital platforms, thus affecting the way of learning [1]. There were new implemented approaches in education that highly influenced the learning progress, mental stability, and thinking process of the learners, especially their critical and creative thinking skills. Also, various factors affected cognitive competence such as adjustments on learning modalities, challenges with online methods, and functionality in this difficult time. Thus, nursing education is one of the highly affected programs since it is more skill-based and the limited access to the actual hospital setting impacts the cultivation of cognitive skills of the students.

The Peak Performance Center (TPPC) [2] defined critical thinking as the analytical, systematic method of rationalizing and explaining evidence to render reasoned judgments and/or assumptions. On the other hand, creative thinking is a method of approaching

from a different angle at concerns or issues that need innovative solutions, according to Ho [3]. Moreover, according to Dwyer [4], by involving some creativity in the synthesis of knowledge, creativity in thoughts can complement critical thinking. These two cognitive skills are attributes being enhanced and essential for nursing students to help in attaining success in diverse learning areas. Thus, the instructors contribute to the new mode of learning by incorporating learning experiences that will cultivate students' mindsets, fostering their critical and creative thinking through multimedia learning resources and activities [5].

In addition, some students stated that a home-learning program is more stressful than a face-to-face setup because of deprived socialization moments and workload is also more extensive because of the scheduled online activities [6]. Since the mode of learning is through digital platforms, too much exposure to gadgets may cause mental and physical health problems affecting students' sense of identity and belonging [7]. However, on the brighter side, this new normal foster student engagement on innovative approaches through case studies producing complex

outputs, improvisation on medical equipment for demonstrations specifically in nursing school [8].

This matter is timely since the nursing program is in the middle of adjustments on how to enhance and provide quality education to the students. The researchers had an interest in conducting this to explore if the students' critical and creative thinking are being applied or enhanced in this online learning by knowing their own challenges, utilized modalities, learning styles, and adaptability. In addition, there are few conducted studies about this especially in the Philippine setting which motivated the researchers to discover something new or less known earlier in order to publish a useful output providing insights and solutions to a true world problem. Thus, results of this study are useful by serving as a reference to new approaches in strengthening teaching strategies the digital way exploring the cultivation of students' thinking skills during this online learning.

Theoretical Framework

Among the intelligence theories, the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence is the most relevant model for this study. Robert Sternberg's theory emphasized three forms of intelligence—analytical, practical, and creative. The in-depth exposition of concepts will provide the background of forms of intelligence for this research and explain how human thinking abilities have been hampered. It is relevant to this study's aims, given the clarity and conciseness it places on the types of thinking process which will be useful in specifying the type that this study is dealing with.

choices, find solutions, and make plans. However, performance components allow people to take action based on the metacomponents' objectives and decisions. Lastly, the knowledge-acquisition empowers people to acquire new things which will aid in executing the plans.

The second sub-theory is experiential, which proposed that intelligent conduct be viewed across a continuum of experience [10]. This is linked to creative thinking which is the capacity to utilize current knowledge to devise new approaches to dealing with various challenges or coping in different circumstances. Essentially, experiential sub theory is accomplished by introducing an unknown assignment at first which requires the person to devise a solution to deal with the problem. At the other end of the automation spectrum, that person will be familiar with that particular job and now perform it with minimum thinking [9].

Contextual sub theory specified that the sociocultural sense determines intelligent behavior. This is connected to practical intelligence that means one's capacity to engage successfully with everyday circumstances. Contextual sub theory occurred and entailed adapting to the physical setting, selecting better environments, and forming the current condition to better suit one's preferences and needs [9].

Objective of the Study

This study explores the cultivation of critical and creative thinking skills of Nursing students in the new normal.

METHODS

Research Design

The researchers used a phenomenological type of qualitative analysis. This approach is sufficient for the research's intent to explore the lived experiences of the nursing students, concerning how they utilized the concept of critical and creative thinking within the new normal setting.

Informants and Sampling Method

This study was conducted at Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas (LPU-B) among 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year level BS Nursing students who are enrolled for the second semester of academic year 2020-2021. They obtained all the required professional nursing subjects to comply with the inclusion criteria. Gender, age, other courses, and schools are excluded

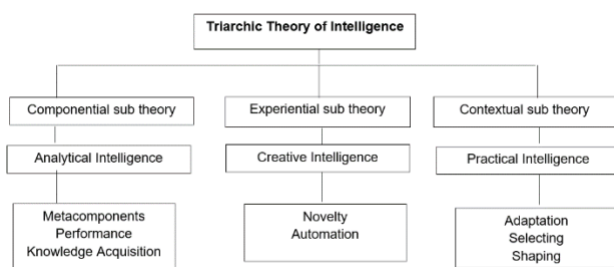


Figure 1. *Triarchic Theory of Intelligence by Robert Sternberg*

Figure 1 shows the three sub-theories of intelligence: Componential, contextual, and experiential sub theory. Based on Vinney [9], the componential sub theory is related to analytical or academic intelligence. Under this is the metacomponents, which enable people to observe, manage, and assess their mental processing to make

on screening potential subjects for this study. A total of 13 informants took part in this research: five students from level three, four students from level two, and four students from level one. Moreover, non-probability sampling schemes were utilized, mainly the purposive and convenience sampling.

Research Instruments

The researchers utilized the interview technique with guide questions to entail interrogating unstandardized questions to the informants in gathering data. Specifically, a semi-structured interview was applied for more thorough data collection through open-ended questions and probing to gather comprehensive details [11]. Moreover, a focus group discussion was done wherein the informants per year level were scheduled for the meeting; one group discussion consisted of the informants and the researchers. The researchers were assigned to specific roles in garnering information during the interview: the interviewer, observer, and note-taker.

Validation of Research Instruments

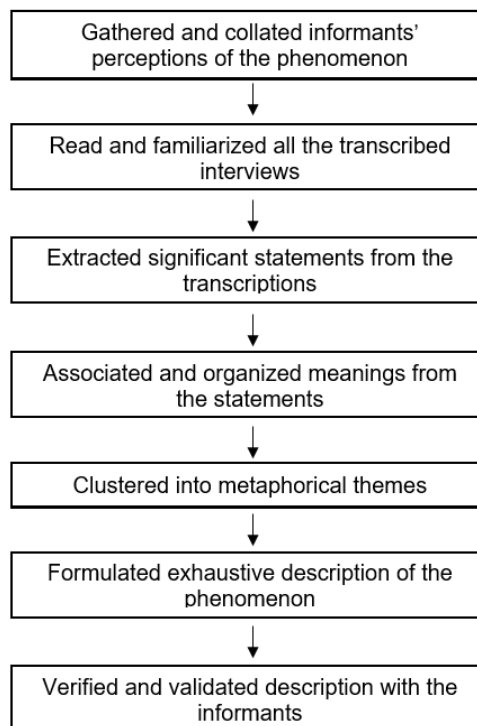
The formulated guide questions were presented and validated by the research adviser and Department Chair and after a set of instructions and reminders, the questions were set down correctly. Afterwards, the pilot phase was conducted among one of the nursing students of LPU-B. One informant was chosen to participate and excluded from being one of the actual informants to prevent bias. The researchers have guaranteed the availability of the informant and met the criterion of being a nursing student in this new normal set-up of learning. A consent was sent and allowed to conduct the pilot study via Microsoft Teams. In the interview, the participant allowed recording of the whole discussion and transcription of it was also done.

Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to the interviews, the paper went through an ethics review and a letter of approval was sent to the Adviser, Department Chair and Dean. The research instrument passed through careful scrutiny by the expert to ensure that the instrument was valid and guaranteed that no biases are seen. The interview questions, furthermore, were used to gather data and extract all the needed information which were then collected, validated, transcribed, analyzed, and evaluated for the final result.

Data Analysis

Figure 2 displays the process of data analysis after gathering and collating all the desired data for the study



using inductive reasoning, from specific observations to broad generalizations or extensive conclusions.

Figure 2. Colaizzi's Methodology

All data were transcribed manually and re-read and all significant statements were identified and categorized through coding based on their affinity and then meanings were associated to delineate the experiences of all the informants. Moreover, these associated meanings were clustered into metaphorical themes that symbolically represent the findings and came up with a conceptual model that developed a full and inclusive description of the topic under study. Lastly, data cleaning and saturation were completed having the informants debriefed to reevaluate and verify the information collected answering the aim of the study and the credibility of all data was ensured with the research adviser.

Ethical Considerations

This study underwent an ethics review under the ethical review board of LPU prior to the completion of the whole paper. The informants participated on the basis of informed consent. In the cover letter, the purpose of the study and its benefits to the researchers, informants, and even the department of Nursing were elaborated to convey the truth about conducting this paper. Every informant's identity and their responses were not publicly shared, instead of their full name disclosure, their initials were written, in adherence to the Data Privacy Act. Also, the decision of the

informants was accepted in taking part of this research and no coercion was applied with due respect to their freedom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theme 1: Challenges on Thinking Skills

This theme tackles the different challenges faced by the students during pure online learning in terms of intellectual and personal aspects and also, the insufficient learning resources that impede their process of acquisition.

Subtheme 1: Unsteady Hands

The researchers used the metaphorical theme of Unsteady Hands due to the fact that online learning has resulted in numerous changes, leading to an unstable manner of obtaining knowledge. These challenges were shown in the statements of the participants: *"I easily lose attention and focus. If I cannot understand, I no longer exert any effort to learn that"* as verbalized by informant 1C, *"We just copy paste, since it's easy to search on the internet."* as narrated by informant 1D. In addition, *"There are a lot of distractions"* as verbalized by informant 2B, *"There are a lot of requirements. My grades are dropping, and I can't understand the topics."* as stated by informant 2D. Also, as verbalized by informant 3D, *"There are too much information and I think it's causing a negative impact"*.

According to the study of Jillings [12], it can be challenging for some students to understand with a less hands-on approach. Student nurses may become unmotivated by academic work because continuing education can be tedious and dull. Tests are given, but there is little supervision to ensure that students are really responding from knowledge. Also, due to several requirements than the traditional setting, some students who are unable to process details effectively or cannot turn in their output on time are left out [13]. Moreover, Rupp [14] stated that being independent, resilient, and self-disciplined are also important but there are students who find it difficult to concentrate, affecting their thinking skills.

Subtheme 2: Loose Grip

Personal challenges are among the other difficulties that students have faced. The theme Loose Grip was chosen to represent the loss of control of one's feelings and thoughts. Since a person no longer has the ability to effectively manage the situation, they become less productive and optimistic, and unable to deal with problems effectively [15].

These were shown in the statements of the informants: *"I am emotionally drained; I can't socialize*

with my classmates. I was just confined to a room." as verbalized by Informant 1A, *"I don't feel any self-improvement"* as verbalized by Informant 1C. Also, *"We do the same consistent routine every day. It becomes burnout."* as narrated by Informant 3A and *"There are too many requirements. It affects our mental health, you will lose time for yourself and other things"*, as told by Informant 2D. Moreover, as verbalized by informant 2C, *"Mental health because I can easily be overwhelmed by activities. I become stressed and I breakdown"*.

According to Jillings [12], the lack of face-to-face interaction can be counterproductive to learning because restricted social experiences do not drive students in the same direction that a traditional classroom would. There are people who are deprived of interacting with new people and to extroverts, this may be a significant disadvantage [14]. Also based on Kaushik [7], spending a significant amount of time in front of a laptop on a daily basis has a negative effect on one's mental well-being and physical health due to a motionless and inactive lifestyle. There could be occurrences of emotional disturbance, underdeveloped sense of identity and belonging affecting the time management and focus of students.

Subtheme 3: Scanty Palms

In nursing education, a skill-based learning approach necessitates materials for return demonstrations of hospital procedures. Challenges in acquiring the aforementioned resources were described as Scanty Palms.

This is evident in the statements of the informants: *"In terms of demonstration, we do not have the apparatus needed"* as verbalized by informant 1A and *"It is difficult since we need to use apparatus and I can't buy it here (US)"* as narrated by informant 1B. Based on informant 2A, *"We have different status in life"*, while informant 2D stated that *"The challenge is the materials that need to be readily available at any given time"*.

In the new normal, global competitiveness requires the creation of a broad range of abilities, including critical thinking, creativity, decision making skills, scientific expertise, and global knowledge. [16]. However, during this pandemic, nursing education is highly affected and the online demonstrations in related learning experiences is a big struggle for students and instructors in terms of improvising the equipment required.

Theme 2: Modalities Utilized by the Nursing Students

This theme provides information on different online modalities or activities applied and offered by the instructors to the nursing students in lecture, skills, and

clinical courses and how these modified learning methods affect the progress of education.

Subtheme 1: Strings of Knowledge

Due to physical restrictions, lecture modalities were maximized in this online learning and these are represented by the theme Strings of Knowledge. They contribute to how the students learn and adapt to this new normal that would cultivate their thinking skills. However, if the information is plentiful, it can result in a stagnant learner.

This is supported by the informants' statements: *"I try all the available online lectures"*, as verbalized by informant 1A, *"I became more flexible, I do not rely so much on discussions only, I read my books on my own, do self-study"* according to informant 2B. Also, as shared by informant 2D, *"With the wide accessibility to the internet, the concepts are easily understood and the strategies in studying are more enhanced"*.

The student's critical thinking skills were challenged as their adjustments from highlighting books and taking down notes have switched to online sources engaging themselves in new approaches. As stated by Rafidi [5], for better learning outcomes, incorporating learning experiences and multimedia learning resources can be done by the instructors to apply the critical thinking skills of the students in different areas.

Subtheme 2: Dexterous Lines

Aside from training the nursing students with the knowledge, the training of skills is also incorporated in nursing education. Despite the limited actual exposure, procedures are still being taught to the students with the use of videos online and demonstrations done by the clinical instructors themselves. Thus, the dexterity of the nursing students is represented by the Dexterous Lines which are influenced by the modalities provided through the creativity and resourcefulness of the students applied in comprehending related learning experiences.

This ability was manifested by the narratives of the informants: *"In return demonstrations, the equipment to be used are not always readily available, improvisation is needed"* as verbalized by informant 1C, while *"To further understand the return demonstration procedures, online access is helpful to analyze more the skills before performing it on your own"* was narrated by informant 1E. In addition, as told by informant 3A, *"Since the set-up is online, being resourceful is essential and that is where the critical and creative thinking will be used"*.

However, through this new normal, the creative thinking of the students emerged where approaching from a different angle at issues that need innovative solutions has paved the way [3]. The students' own strategies and resourcefulness in creating the needed materials for the

return demonstration helped in formulating innovative approaches to cope with diverse problems.

Subtheme 3: Twine of Competence

To achieve the attributes of competence, students are being enhanced in the nursing school to develop not just for experiences but for holistic growth as well. Despite all the impediments and hardships, the students are prepared to be as strong as a twine being the future front liners in the healthcare field.

The critical and creative thinking skills of the nursing students are being enhanced in the activities supplied by the instructors as stated by the informants: *"In doing case studies, our minds think critically and the problems of the patients are rationalized well to implement the best interventions"*, as verbalized by informant 1B, *"Because of the limited interaction, our imaginative/creative minds are enhanced especially in filling out hospital forms of different patients"* as narrated by informant 2C. Also, as verbalized by informant 2D, *"In health teachings, learnings are applied by utilizing different online sources like making infographics for patient managements and with these, we become more creative"*.

As stated by Morin [8], compared to the traditional set-up of spending numerous hours in the classroom and clinical duties for actual exposures, the new learning setting made the students focused more on case studies and other clinical activities. This includes presentations, discussions, and rationalizations wherein critical thinking and creative ideas are integrated to develop a complex output for nursing care.

Theme 3: Nursing Students' Thinking Skills in the Pandemic

This theme discusses the cultivation of thinking skills of the nursing students and those who view online education as functional learning or inconvenient learning based on their perceptions and experiences.

Subtheme 1: Adaptive Puppet

The learners who are described as Adaptive Puppets are functional and are able to fit and refine impediments by turning them into a more convenient outlook. They are influenced by different means of education that will make them progress as learners. This depicts their ability to absorb all the new learning approaches.

Consequently, a positive outlook in online learning is signified by the following statements: *"Creativity and critical thinking are involved in the character of being resourceful and we are all being dependent on ourselves and flexible in all matters"* as expressed by informant 3C. Also, as asserted by informant 2D *"It is somewhat effective because of convenient accessibility to different concepts"*. In addition, as narrated by informant 3D *"Various online resources helped me sharpen my critical*

thinking and creative mind and I can swiftly identify problems and come up with an effective solution".

Students are not only the ones adjusting to changes, based on the study of Shirazi and Heidari [17], instructors also recognize each class's dominant style when using appropriate teaching strategies, which help to revamp their comprehension skills even in a virtual manner. As stated by Rafidi [5], lecturers can better improve learning outcomes by integrating approaches that cultivate mindsets.

Subtheme 2: Perplexed Marionette

The metaphorical theme of the perplexed marionette portrayed the students who are puzzled and have trouble with this set-up. They focus more on submitting requirements and not on the absorption of information.

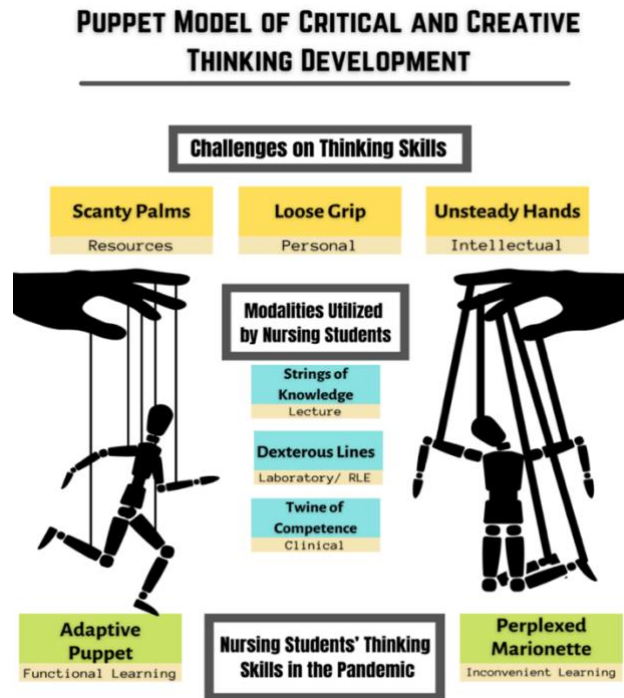
Students find it difficult to practice critical and creative thinking due to the limitations with the resources and lack of personal interaction, as displayed on the following statements: "Since this is a skills-based program, I find it very difficult to comprehend the lessons specifically the third-year courses" as verbalized by informant 1A. Also, "It is getting boring because we are only attending online classes, but the input of knowledge is decreased, and we just tend to search everything on the internet" as affirmed by informant 1C. According to informant 1E, "Sometimes I do not think deeply the tasks or activities that I'm doing unlike before since our place is situated in a community where internet connection is poor and unavailable; hence, I just tend to pass the requirements needed for the specific subject". Moreover, as expressed by informant 3A, "In comparison with the face-to-face class, there is a limited critical and creative thinking at present since I do not have much person or classmate to talk to."

A lot of schools were not completely prepared for this set-up because of financial and technological shortages. Arado [18] stated that not all schools and students are capable of having stable internet connection and gadgets for online classes.

Based on the study conducted by Baticulon et. al [19], students find it harder to comprehend lessons on their own. Thus, the most common barriers were discovered to be difficulty adapting learning styles, the responsibilities needed at home, and lack of specific guidance from educators.

As the year level ascends, the courses are getting more loaded that could affect the students. Some students stated that a home-learning program is more stressful than a face-to-face setup. Hence, having friends makes learning more manageable, but online classes deprive socialization moments [6].

Figure 3. Puppet Model of Critical and Creative Thinking Development



This Puppet Model was constructed showing the discussed themes that represent the relationship of the challenges encountered by the informants, their adaptability to the new mode of learning, and the application of thinking skills in modalities used by the nursing students. Through the use of the parts of a puppet, the end result of the study was presented metaphorically, and these concepts had affected the critical and creative thinking skills of the students.

Each part of the puppet model discussed certain experiences of the nursing students in the new normal. The hand depicts the challenges of a student which can have a significant effect on academic performance and influence how the puppet or learner will do. These were represented by three themes: "Scanty Palms" or the availability of resources, "Loose Grip" or personal challenges and "Unsteady Hands" or intellectual challenges in online learning. Moreover, the strings portray the utilized learning modalities represented by the following themes: "Strings of Knowledge" or lecture given online, "Dexterous Lines" or related learning experiences and "Twine of Competence" or the clinical modalities applying knowledge, skills, and attitude as a nurse. Moreover, these factors led to the classification of two types of students in the models represented by the marionettes. They are influenced by the strings and affected by the movements executed by the hands. The "Adaptive Puppet" depicts the functional learners or the

running figure representing the freshmen and sophomore nursing students who reflect positive impact in cultivation of their thinking skills. However, the “Perplexed Marionette” depicts inconvenient learners or the kneeling figure with thick strings experiencing difficulty in managing the volume of activities and information being conveyed to them.

Furthermore, the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence by Robert Sternberg is related to the Puppet Model of Critical and Creative Thinking Development, which focused on the same concepts of effectively cultivating the thought process. However, this Puppet Model is a broader version that identified specific areas of challenges, modalities, and application of analytical and creative thinking which were purposely drawn from the perspective of a specific group of people, mainly nursing students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Cultivating critical and creative thinking of nursing students in the new normal were centered on their adaptability and functionality in coping with challenges and accomplishing course-required activities. These are due to the fact that online learning has resulted in numerous adjustments, leading in an unstable method of obtaining knowledge. The result shows that first and second year nursing students are still actively developing their thinking skills, while third year students are struggling to do so. This is because junior students have an ample workload, learning more advanced nursing subjects, and more concerned on the submission of requirements rather than learning, making it difficult for them to adapt to the situation. However, the freshmen and sophomore students were still able to manage the given topics and activities.

The application of critical and creative thinking skills was demonstrated through the learning modalities specifically in lecture, skills or RLE, and clinical activities. As a result, it was concluded that among all the critical thinking skills, the student’s analysis, inference, and problem-solving skills were mostly developed. However, communication and observation skills were limited due to physical set up restrictions. When it comes to creative thinking skills, this was fully developed in all aspects because the new normal requires the student to be imaginative and innovative. The Puppet Model of Critical and Creative Thinking Development was formulated which discussed factors that can affect the thinking skills of the students. This model was developed to understand the phenomena so that educators and learners can devise a solution to successfully improve their thinking skills. It is recommended to utilize the conceptual framework as one of the bases for enhanced learning approaches. Enrichment of approaches on discussion should also be done by having short reviews to avoid stagnant set-up of pure discussions only and brainstorming in between discussions on different case scenarios to improve

comprehension by giving feedback. For students, it is recommended to foster time management, reinforce support system, maintain focused, eliminate distraction, and create a space for concentration to further cultivate cognitive skills.

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