


An Analytical Study of Differentiated Instruction Strategies in Narrative Text Teaching at Junior High School

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* Aisyah Adawiyah, Ana Christanti^{ab} 

¹²Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sidoarjo, Indonesia.

Corresponding Author: adawiyahaisyah58@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the implementation of differentiated instruction in teaching narrative texts of 8th-grade students at SMP Islam Sidoarjo and to evaluate students' narrative writing within this approach. Numerous studies have investigated the students' comprehension of narrative material in general. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by focusing on Indonesia's fairy tales and legends. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The analysis of students' writing focused on five components: content, organisation, language use, grammar, and mechanics. Showed higher achievement in content understanding, with lowest performance in mechanics and language use. The results indicate that differentiated instruction enhances students' engagement and comprehension in narrative writing, though further focus is needed on improving technical writing aspects. The findings revealed that the English teacher implemented differentiated instruction by adjusting content, process, and product based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Other findings show that teachers did not conduct diagnostic tests to determine group based on students' learning styles. Therefore, it is important for further researchers to pay attention to teacher abilities when implementing differentiated learning, so that no steps are missed. This research contributes to providing insights for teachers in optimizing differentiated instruction in English writing.

Keywords: *Differentiated Instruction, Narrative Text, Writing*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has shown a great commitment to education. The Ministry of Education and Culture's 2025 goal, which aims to create "Smart and Competitive Indonesian People," serves as evidence of this. Differentiated instruction is one approach that teachers can use to allow students to choose their own educational path, as required by the Independent Curriculum. This is carried out due to differentiated education, which acknowledges that every student has distinct learning requirements and that a customised approach is required. Nowadays, difficulty in learning English for students is a problem that is often encountered by English language teachers. Because the language being studied is not the student's first language. To provide students with understanding in English material, teachers need appropriate learning methods. The Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program is implemented in Indonesian schools beginning in junior high school and continuing through university or college (Jamaris, 2017). Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is used to describe teaching English to students for whom it is not their first language (Rohmah, 2013). In connection with the teaching of language, we are also known as the term "language skill". Language skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Jamaris (2017) explained that the four language skills that TEFL aims to impart the students in Indonesian schools are listening comprehension, speaking skills, reading comprehension, and writing skills.

Writing is skills that must be learned in English. By writing, we can express ideas and respond to things in written form. As has been stated in Gultom et al., (2022), one of the most important abilities to acquire is writing, which is the act of communicating thoughts or written material so that readers may comprehend what we are trying to say. Making the material cohesive and coherent is another important component of good writing by the students (Putra et al., 2022). Haliday and Hasan in (Putra et al., 2022) explained that Coherence is the process of grouping sentences according to their context, meanwhile, Cohesion describes how we integrate the discourse.

Another way to convey ideas and thoughts in written form. Through writing, we can inspire, convey messages, and entertain the readers. People are expected to be able to communicate their thoughts in writing (Siregar & Hasibuan, 2021). There are many other purposes for writing, which depend on what will be written and who will read it. Students who are proficient in writing should be able to articulate their ideas and thoughts clearly (Nanda et al., 2022). By knowing what aspects make good writing, the purpose can be conveyed to the right readers.

Components of writing include content, organization, grammar, language use, and mechanics (Jacobs et al., 1981). Content refers to the substance or essence of writing, the main and supporting ideas presented, the quality and depth of the information, the relevance and suitability of the information to the topic or purpose of the writing, development of ideas and arguments, clarity and coherence in conveying information, originality of thoughts or points of view expressed. Writing organisation involves the writing's flow and structure, making sure that concepts are presented logically and are simple for the reader to understand. Language use in writing is the process by which writers create sentences and employ grammatical, syntactic, and lexical elements to successfully communicate ideas. The writing is made clearer and more effective by using appropriate grammar. Writing mechanics include capitalisation, spelling, punctuation, and handwriting legibility. These components are essential for creating written communication that is coherent, efficient, and clear. The ideas and facts that are given in the writing are referred to as content, and they should be accurate, well-developed, and relevant.

In addition, Gultom et al (2022) mentioned some examples of the various text genres, there are narrative, recount, descriptive, report, explanation, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, process, discussion, review, anecdote, satire, and news item. Every literary genre has its own objective, generic structure, and language characteristics, and each one serves a distinct function. Asrul et al (2021), define a narrative as a text that recounts an action or event that occurred and is acted upon by one or more characters, along with complications and resolutions that are relevant to the characters. Narrative text comes in several forms. They will either become reality, fiction, or a mix of the two. These include historical narratives, fables, myths and legends, fantasy, fairy tales, mysteries, adventure tales, romances, horror stories, and personal experiences that take place in the past and incorporate moral lessons from the story itself (Yuniyanti, 2023). In order to achieve the goal of narrative text, the writer must pay attention to the structure of the narrative text. There are several structures to consider when writing narrative text: orientation, complication, resolution, and re-orientation (Siregar & Hasibuan, 2021). The first paragraph, which introduces the story's characters, is known as orientation. The primary component of narrative is complication. A significant event pushes the complication along, and it is typically expected that some kind of trouble or complicating circumstance will occur at that time. It can be demonstrated that the conflict is a normal social or psychological one. The story's coda, or resolution, is a final statement that is optional. It includes the writer's guidance, instruction, or moral lesson.

However, according to Broughton et al., (2003), the act of writing varies from that of talking in that it is less spontaneous and more permanent, and the resources which are available for communication are less since it cannot do in conversation, interact with the listeners and modify as it go along. Therefore, students still often have difficulties in writing a

text. Additionally, the students will find difficulties in writing because English is not their first language (Putra et al., 2022).

To overcome the problem of writing difficulties among students, teachers need appropriate learning strategies. Likewise stated by Tomlinson & Imbeau (2023) teachers must comprehend that learning and developmental patterns differ among individuals, that students bring distinct individual differences to the learning process, and that learning environments must be safe and supportive for students to be successful if they want to ensure that every student acquires new knowledge and skills. The students' differences motivate the teacher to carefully select the best teaching methods in order to instruct each student equally (Mirawati et al., 2022). Teaching and learning activity strategies are the most important things in determining students' success in understanding the material. Students certainly have different learning styles and abilities in the learning process. Teachers must pay attention to these differences and provide solutions with learning strategies that suit students. So that students can understand the material easily, because the learning method suits what they are interested in.

Differentiated instruction, a concept initially presented by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2001), focuses on educational leadership, foundations, and policy at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Differentiating instruction refers to altering classroom activities to provide students with various ways to absorb information, comprehend concepts, and demonstrate their understanding of what they have learned (Tomlinson, 2001). Differentiated instruction is designed to suit students' learning styles, levels, and interests in the learning process by carrying out pre-assessments or one-on-one interviews between the educator and the learner (Mirawati et al., 2022). After knowing the students' needs, the next step is to do the treatment. Tomlinson (2001) distinguishes between four types of differentiation instruction: content, process, and product. Content is the skills, knowledge, and comprehension that students want or how they acquire those skills and abilities (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). According to Tomlinson (2023), process is types of differentiated instruction that explain how students interpret or comprehend the content. While for product is how students express their knowledge, comprehension, and abilities following a longer learning time (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). Teachers need to pay attention to this so that they can bring optimal learning outcomes for students. Because they can understand the material according to their needs. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023) give particular instances of how content, process, and product may all be implemented into the classroom. A few examples of how to implement differentiated instruction based on student need that used by the researcher for guide in doing observation can be seen on Table 1.

Table 1. A Few Examples of Differentiated Instruction by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023)

	Readiness	Interest	Learning Environment
Content	1. Materials at varied readability levels 2. Recorded text 3. Video 4. Images, graphics 5. Spelling and other skills assigned by current student proficiency 6. Alternate presentation methods 7. Targeted small-group instruction 8. Front-loaded vocabulary 9. Highlighted texts	1. Range of reading materials, videos, interviews, etc., that apply key ideas and skills to a variety of real-world situations 2. Teacher presentations designed to link essential content to student interests	1. Varied teaching modes (e.g., verbal, visual, rhythmic, practical demonstrations, role-play) 2. Video or audio versions of directions and/or presentations for students who learn better with repeated listening or viewing
Process	1. Tiered activities 2. Mini-workshops 3. Flexible use of time 4. Learning contracts	1. Expert groups 2. Interest centers 3. Spotlight on individuals from many cultures who make/have made	1. Choice of working conditions (e.g., alone or with a partner, seated or standing, quietly or with conversation)

	Readiness	Interest	Learning Environment
	5. Varied homework assignments	significant contributions to a discipline	2. Tasks designed around real world applications
	6. RAFT options	4. Supplementary materials based on student interests	3. RAFT options
	7. Flexible grouping	5. Jigsaws	4. Blogs, vlogs, animations, pod casts, etc., to explore a topic
	8. Small-group instruction	6. Independent inquiries	5. Voice-to-text apps for writing
	9. Use of resources written in English learners' home language and/or initial drafts of products written in home language	7. Interest-based application options	
		8. RAFT options	
Product	1. Tiered product assignments	1. Teacher use of student interests in designing products and performance assessments	1. Complex instruction
	2. Personal goal setting	2. Options for students to propose alternate products	2. Varied formats for expressing key content
	3. Varied resource options	3. Design a Day options	3. Varied working arrangements
	4. Check-in requirements based on degree of student independence	4. Personalized inquiries	4. Varied modes of demonstrating learning (e.g., video, audio, graphic novels, graphic explanations of content in varied disciplines, interviews, photo essays)
	5. Providing samples of quality student work at varied levels of complexity	5. Use of a range of technologies for student exploration and expression	

Differentiated instruction has been shown in numerous studies to enhance student learning in the classroom by incorporating Google Sites into differentiated instruction substantially improves students' motivation and reading comprehension (Najemi et al., (2024). It recommends a more extensive use of digital resources in the classroom to raise student engagement and reading levels. Research by Sundari et al (2024) has found that differentiated instruction can improve learning motivation and reading comprehension. Subsequently, the result of the research by Mirawati et al., (2022) shows that differentiated instruction improve the teacher-student relationship, encourage underachievers, and boost student engagement, collaboration, and interaction. The research result of Efira Maya Shinta (2021), it is crucial to modify teaching strategies to accommodate students' diverse needs in order to enhance their educational experiences and results in narrative text comprehension.

According to previous studies, differentiated instruction has a positive impact on teaching and learning activities, particularly in enhancing students' learning motivation as well as their reading and writing comprehension. The main difference between earlier research and this study lies in the lesson material. While previous studies generally focused on students' comprehension of narrative texts, this study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the application of differentiated instruction in writing narrative texts, specifically with a focus on the themes of Indonesian fairy tales and legends. The selected stories include *The Legend of Surabaya*, *The Legend of Banyuwangi*, *The Legend of Toba Lake*, *The Legend of Prambanan Temple*, and *Malin Kundang*, and the study is conducted with class 8-1 students at SMP Islam Sidoarjo. This focus serves as the novelty of the research, as a preliminary study conducted through interviews with eighth-grade English teachers at SMP Islam Sidoarjo revealed that students experience more difficulty in writing narrative texts compared to other types of English texts. Based on this context, the research questions are: (1) How is differentiated instruction implemented in teaching narrative texts? and (2) How do students perform in writing narrative texts under differentiated instruction? Accordingly, the objectives of this research are, first, to describe the implementation of differentiated instruction in teaching narrative texts, and second, to analyze students' writing performance within this instructional framework.

The results of this study are expected to provide the following significance: 1) Hopefully, this research can be a reference for future researchers who are interested in studying further the application of differentiated instruction to students writing in Narrative Text material. 2) Expectedly, the result of this research can provide insight for teachers to understand how to increase students' writing skills in Narrative Text so that they can obtain optimal learning outcomes through the application of differentiated instruction. 3) Besides that, this study will

help students, particularly those studying English, with their narrative writing skills. Additionally, it is intended that the teacher's many instructions would help students become better writers.

METHOD

In conducting the research study, the researcher employed descriptive qualitative research. According to Miles and Huberman (2014), descriptive qualitative research is a source of comprehensive, well-supported explanations and descriptions of human processes. One can maintain chronological flow, determine which events resulted in which outcomes, and extract useful explanations from qualitative data. In their renowned book, "Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook", Miles and Huberman provide a detailed manual for qualitative researchers that offers up-to-date techniques and helpful advice for interpreting qualitative data.

Respondents

This research took place at SMP Islam Sidoarjo, which is located at Sidokumpul, Sidoarjo Regency, East Java. Research subjects are research participants who are either used to provide information on the conditions and environments of the research setting or who are seen as the objectives of the research. Therefore, the research's subjects are 40 students of 8th grade of SMP Islam Sidoarjo.

Data Collection

The data collection techniques used in this research were observation and documentation. Structured observations were conducted over three teaching sessions involving the implementation of differentiated instruction. Observation sheets were used to collect data throughout the learning process to examine how the teacher applied differentiated instruction. In this context, the researcher served as the observer, while the English teacher carried out the instruction. Additionally, documentation was collected in the form of students' written texts, which were analyzed using an assessment rubric.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. (1) Data Reduction refers to the process of selecting, limiting, organizing, abstracting, and transforming the data obtained from field notes, interview transcripts, written documents, and other empirical sources (Miles et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher observed the learning process and identified activities that reflected the implementation of differentiated instruction. Additionally, the researcher analyzed students' narrative texts using an assessment rubric. (2) Data Display involves presenting the data in the form of narrative descriptions to make the information more accessible and easier to interpret. (3) Conclusion Drawing is the final stage, where the researcher draws conclusions based on the data obtained from observation sheets and students' narrative writing. This stage is carried out using the results of the data reduction and data display processes to formulate findings and interpretations.

Procedures

The data that have been collected are the implementation of differentiated instruction in three meetings, and students' writing of narrative text. The data will be presented descriptively by using Tomlinson and Imbeau's theory to observe the implementation of differentiated instruction. The Analytical scoring rubric was adapted from Jacobs et al (1981) in Weigle's book (Weigle, 2002). The assessment rubric of writing can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Scoring Writing Rubric Assessment Adapted from Jacob et.al (1981)

Components of Writing	Scores	Indicators
Content	4	The text is very interesting, relevant and shows a clear understanding of the topic. Ideas are well developed and detailed.
	3	The text is relevant and clear, with well-developed ideas and detail.
	2	The text is somewhat clear but lacks depth or the ideas are not detailed enough. Some parts are off topic.

Organisation	1	The text is unclear or off-topic, with ideas that are underdeveloped or irrelevant.
	4	The text is structured logically with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. It can connect each idea to create a regular storyline.
	3	The text has a clear structure but there are slight deviations in the use of flow.
	2	The text shows some structure, but it is inconsistent. The way the flow is used is lacking.
	1	The text lacks a clear structure, and the ideas are not well organized or connected.
Language Use	4	Demonstrates mastery of vocabulary, and sentence variety. Use of language enhances clarity and narrative style.
	3	Adequate vocabulary and sentence variety. There are some errors but they do not affect the clarity of the text.
	2	Limited vocabulary range. There are many mistakes that can change the meaning.
	1	Vocabulary errors significantly affect clarity. Sentences are simple or repetitive.
Grammar	4	There are no errors in the use of grammar.
	3	There are some grammatical errors in making sentences
	2	There are many grammar mistakes in making sentences
	1	Almost all sentences contain grammatical errors
	4	The writing is free from spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors. The narration is smooth and professional.
Mechanic	3	There are a few minor errors in spelling, punctuation, or capitalization, but they do not detract from the quality of the writing.
	2	There are frequent mechanical writing errors that can distract the reader.
	1	Many spelling, punctuation, or capitalization errors that interfere with readability.
	1	

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Researcher collected data using observation sheets and a writing rubric assessment as research instruments. The following explained the results of the observation and students' writing text:

Implementation Differentiated Instruction for Teaching Narrative Text

First Meeting

The first meeting was held on Tuesday, 11 February 2025, with class 8-1 students of SMP Islam Sidoarjo, and the session lasted for 3 x 105 minutes. A total of 31 students were present, while 9 students were absent—comprising 5 male and 4 female students. This first meeting was coded as (A.1). The findings indicate that the teacher implemented Differentiated Content based on the framework of Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023), with a focus on students' Readiness (R). Two key activities reflected this implementation: point 1, "Materials at varied readability levels," and point 7, "Targeted small group instruction" (see Table 1). The teacher divided students into three groups according to their readiness levels: Group A (basic) for students with beginner-level skills, Group B (intermediate) for students with moderate abilities, and Group C (advanced) for students with higher proficiency.

Then each group gets a text whose level of difficulty has been adjusted to their abilities, so that students can understand the text easily. Group A get "The Legend of Surabaya", group B get "The Legend of Toba Lake and Banyuwangi", Group C get "The Legend of Prambanan Temple and Malin Kundang" This activity is in accordance with what the researcher has quoted in Tomlinson & McTighe (2006), who note that differentiated content is focuses on different ways or modes that students can access important information, namely text at different levels of complexity. In preparing the material of narrative text in differentiated content, the teacher focuses on student needs by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023), namely readiness.

Second Meeting

The second meeting was held on Tuesday, 18 February 2025, with grade 8-1 students of SMP Islam Sidoarjo, and the session lasted for 3 x 105 minutes. A total of 37 students attended the meeting, while 3 female students were absent. This meeting was coded as (A.2). The findings indicate that the teacher implemented Differentiated Process based on the framework of Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023), focusing on three aspects: Readiness (R) – specifically point 9, “Use of resources written in English learners’ home language and/or initial drafts of products written in home language”; Interest (I) – point 2, “Interest Centers”; and Learning Environment (L) – point 4, “Use of blogs, animations, podcasts, etc., to explore a topic.” In the first activity, the teacher grouped students based on their learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The visual group received illustrated texts as story guides, the auditory group received audio recordings, and the kinesthetic group was provided with story pieces as stimuli for composing stories. However, the teacher did not conduct a diagnostic test to identify students’ learning styles prior to grouping them. Instead, the grouping was based on the teacher’s prior teaching experience. As a result, the researcher found that some steps in the differentiation process – specifically the diagnostic phase – were not fully implemented by the teacher.

The second activity implemented by the teacher focused on students’ Interest, specifically point 2: “Interest Centers” (I2). In this activity, students were given the freedom to choose from a selection of Indonesian folk tales and legends that had been prepared by the teacher. The learning process was centered around students’ individual interests in selecting these stories, with the aim of making it easier for them to understand and engage with the content.

After going through several activities according to students’ learning style abilities, learning environment, and interests, in this activity, students recreate the chosen story using their own language. The text created will be a guide for creating the final product at the third meeting. In the second meeting, the researcher observed the implementation of differentiated processes by teachers (Tomlinson, 2001). According to Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023), in their book “Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom 2nd Edition”, they state that process is types of differentiated instruction that explain how students interpret or comprehend the content. The teacher practices this learning activity consistently with the theory used by the researcher. But in dividing the group based on students’ learning styles, the teacher did not conduct cognitive tests, which are an important step in group selection in differentiated instruction. This shows that in this activity, the teacher missed an important step in differentiated learning.

Third Meeting

The third meeting was held on Tuesday, 25 February 2025 in the 8-1 grade of SMP Islam Sidoarjo with a time allocation of 3 x 105 minutes. There are 40 students attending. In the third meeting, the teacher implemented Differentiated Product by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023) that focused on students’ Interest (I) point 1 namely “Teacher use of student interests in designing products and performance assessments” and Learning Environment (L) point 3 namely “Varied working arrangements”. The first activity, the students made the products from the narrative writing they created in the previous meeting. There are three options for making product narrative text, namely storytelling, story posters, and short videos. The delivery of students’ narrative text results is not only in the form of presentations or reading texts in front of the class. This is supported by Tomlinson and Moon (2013), which states that a product is authentic, a rich final test that asks students to apply, extend, or transfer what they have learnt over time.

The second activity is learning environment point 3 namely “Varied working arrangements” (L3). Students are free to choose to work in groups or individually in making products. This is also adjusted to the needs and concepts they create in the selected product. During the product work, the teacher also monitors each group to ensure the product preparation step is running well. In practice, most of the students choose storytelling and short

videos, and the design of posters. This activity shows that the teacher has used two students' needs, namely interest and learning environment, as described by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023).

The Result of Students Writing Narrative Text

The data result was utilized to evaluate students' writing text, after being given Differentiated Instruction during teaching narrative text. There are five components of writing that are indicators used by researchers in assessing students' writing texts. Namely, Content, Organization, Language Use, Mechanics, and grammar (Jacobs et al., 1981). Each component has 4 scores, including score 1 for the lowest criteria or needs improvement. Score 2 for quite satisfactory criteria. Score 3 for good criteria, and score 4 for perfect criteria. The writing rubric assessment can be seen in Appendix 3. Based on students' writing results, the researcher found 109 scores for Content, 106 scores for Grammar, 100 scores for Organisation, 95 scores for Language use, and 78 scores for Mechanics. It shows that students have a greater tendency in Content. The table and chart can be seen in Table 3 and Figure 1.

Table 3. The Result of Students' Writing Each Component

Score	4	3	2	1	Total	%
Content (C)	40	42	22	5	109	23%
Grammar (G)	36	42	22	6	106	22%
Organisation (O)	32	39	20	9	100	20%
Language Use (L)	16	48	24	7	95	19%
Mechanic (M)	16	24	20	8	68	14%

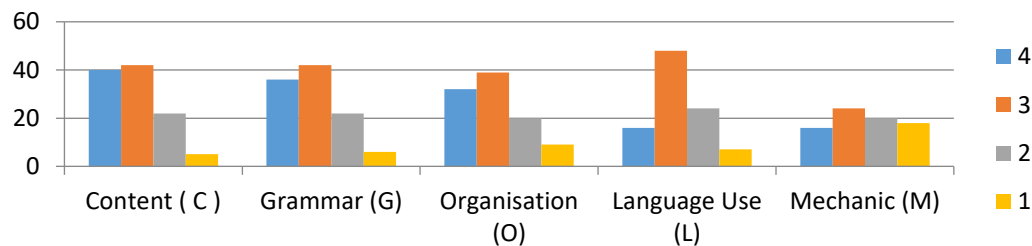


Figure 1. Chart of Students Writing

The researcher found that most students can understand the text by looking at the scores that students get for each component. Because learning has been differentiated according to the needs of students, and the material provided by the teacher has been adjusted to the level of understanding of students. So that students can easily recreate the story using their own language. Meanwhile, students experienced a decrease in scores in other components. This is because other components are related to vocabulary, grammar, use of punctuation, capital letters, and text structure. Because not all students have mastered a lot of vocabulary and understand how to use punctuation, capital letters, and good text structure.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this research was to describe the implementation of differentiated instruction in teaching narrative text at 8th grade of SMP Islam Sidoarjo. Based on the research findings, the researcher shows that the implementation of differentiated instruction is achieved by preparing the same material at different levels, narrative texts with various topics, and prioritizing the students' needs. But the teacher did not apply a cognitive test before dividing the group based on students' learning styles. This contributes to a gap between the theory of differentiated instruction and the practice of the teachers. Other findings are that students have high scores in the Content component, students already have a high understanding of and can recreate a narrative text, but not in the Mechanic component. This research provides a foundation for exploring the application of differentiated instruction, and this research can help future researcher who wish to delve deeper into the topic of differentiated instruction.

However, future research should pay attention to the teacher's ability to apply differentiated learning. So that every activity that has been arranged in the lesson plan can be carried out well.

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