

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN SULTANAE OF OMAN

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of professional development programs for school administrators to improve them in basic and post-basic education. Many PDP have been done by the Muscat Governorate of Education and a lot of money has been spent in implementing the programs over the last thirteen years for development, enrichment and remedial (knowledge, skills and attitudes of school administrators). Two types of data were collected and used in this study; qualitative and quantitative data to provide valid and more reliable research findings. Qualitative data were gathered from interviews and document analysis and quantitative data were retrieved from a set of questionnaires. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The research investigated the effectiveness of the PDP as perceived by the programs participants. The population for this research was 250 school administrators (principals and assistants), in Muscat Governorate of Education. Two hundred and fifteen questionnaires were returned and completed by respondents (77 male and 138 female). Respondents completed a research survey designed to measure perceptions of 77 items for six domains including availability and practice level, level of effectiveness of the programs and the difficulties that hinder effectiveness of PDP. The conceptual framework was based on CIPP Model as proposed by Stufflebeam (2003). The findings of this research indicated that the majority of respondents felt that professional development programs were important and not a waste of time. At the same time they requested organizers to be more concerned when implementing PDP. Although document analysis indicated that there were two kinds of PDP (training & qualification) most programs tended in the same direction. Another significant finding indicates the limited opportunities for PDP; programs not on the right track; lack of scholarships, the work leave system to continue higher education, opportunities for attending conferences inside and outside the country, for exchange visits outside the region and opportunity to participate in training courses outside the Sultanate of Oman were considered crucial among administrators. Another finding in the availability level indicates that there were significant differences in favor of female participants. The findings show that the respondents felt that the planning of PDP could be improved in many aspects such as training needs procedure, weakness of participation administrators when planning of PDP and there were no long term plans for PDP, although planning of PDP was considered the first step to get high level advantages. Other challenges in PDP were: how to correlate between the theoretical side and the practical side in development programs, the limitedness of exchange visits; assessing student learning or the specification of the programs and the targeted staff in the PDP; meetings do not provide solutions to educational issues; lack of cooperation between departments in conveying knowledge to school principals; trainers are inefficient due to the lack of cooperation with the different educational institutions and the method of preparing the work papers is not realistic.

Keywords: Effectiveness, programs, administrators.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Administrators are one of the key role players in enhancing the educational field, in line with the visions and missions that the Ministry of Education hopes to achieve. Their roles and responsibilities are intended to improve the educational findings to cover the present and future requirements. This aim and ambition can only be accomplished if the principals' professional competency is developed through integrated and continuous professional development programs.

The professional development program wherein the directors can participate in a wholesome manner is a fundamental requirement, as these directors are the key to the development and growth (Fullan, 1992).

Skills development training of teachers and other people employed in the education sector, has been an important issue and in the spotlight from 1998/1999. This year, the Sultanate of Oman is working on developing its educational system by applying the basic educational system (1st to the 10th grade) and reaching to the post - basic education (11th to 12th grade).

This change was a result of the Government 's "Vision 2020" Principles, set out at a conference in 1995 and Government's Five- Year- Plan for the period 1996- 2000 (MOE, 1997). Oman 2020 vision is to prepare the nation's human resources to face the challenges of the globalized era effectively, in order to develop the country and maintain the Omani culture (Al-Harathi, 2002).

Thus, educational administration in schools is considered an essential and important element for applying, supervising the development, raising the formation, and achieving the necessary goals of education. In addition, the achievement of the strategies and development programs depend on the competencies and functional abilities of administrative staff. Therefore, the aims of enhancing professional development programs are unlikely to be achieved except by evaluating the existing development program and its functions.

## **1.1 Background of the study**

Professional development is the vital artery for the heart of any foundation. Through it we can improve the abilities and skills of the employees by training and directing them, improving their competency to develop their work, to increase the productivity, and to improve the findings (Al Harthi, 2006).

Reilly and Brown (1996) discussed the major complex issues involved in developing school leadership programs for effective school leadership.

Preston (2010), investigates whether the literature on high level training evaluation accurately reflected the expectations of organizational leaders regarding training evaluation reports. Findings of the study indicated that while leaders did not always request high level training evaluation data, they found the data valuable when given to them.

Joseph E. llecki (2010), in his research showed that organizations that had a written policy related to training and evaluation programs had more success at evaluation. He recommended developing and implementing a formal evaluation policy and recommended that staff should continuously participate in learning forums so as to enhance their skills in order to plan better, implement, and evaluate training programs.

When the Ministry of Education decided to develop the educational leaders, supervisors sought to improve the learning-educating process and improve the educational findings. The planning of professional development had already begun in an integrated graph manner with a multiple means for its educational elements, including the school principals and their assistants (Al Harthi, 2006).

Finally, courses, workshops, meetings, conferences, lectures, brochures and academic qualifying programs, all have a need for continuous improvements. This study explores and searches the facts about professional development programs, for school administrators.

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

Findings from this study could also be implemented for the planning of more effective and efficient programs to be used by school administrators, which will enhance staff performance. In this context there are many advantages of the evaluation of an effective professional development program:

- ❖ Evaluating the effectiveness of PDP can provide relevant, reliable, and valid data to help make justifiable decisions on how to improve programs and other solutions, what programs and solutions to continue or discontinue, how to get closer to organizational goals, and whether current goals are worth pursuing.
- ❖ Evaluation plans and frameworks provide the basis for designing, developing, and implementing project management plans.
- ❖ Evaluation of the effectiveness of PDP can identify any adjustments that have to be made during and after development and implementation, so that resources are maximized.
- ❖ Evaluation provides the means to document successes, so that the merit of decisions, department, staff and solutions are included.

## **2 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Professional development is an indicator to processes and activities of design; to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of administrators; so that it is possible they can improve their school. In some cases, it also involves learning how to redesign educational structures and cultures (Guskey & Huberman, 1995).

Ray Bolam defined professional development as:

- An ongoing process of education, training, learning and support activities.
- For increased development to decide and implement valued changes in leadership behavior.
- To educate their staff more effectively.
- Achieving an agreed balance between individual, school and national needs. (Bush & Bell, 2002).

### **2.1 Effectiveness**

The issue of the level of effectiveness is considered as a central concept in administrating programs. Batti (1985), said we attempt to take effectiveness – based planning to the next level by prescribing precisely what must be done in planning and administrating programs so that they can be said to be effective (Kettener, Moroney and Martin, 1999). Therefore, the designing of effective programs requires a careful, detailed thought process that begins with understanding when analysis data on effectiveness, which, in turn will allow us to make changes in these programs.

When looking at the effectiveness level, there are several steps involved to produce a better understanding of the problem to be addressed, to measure participant opportunities, to measure the constraints that surround the effectiveness of professional development programs, and to examine the outcome of these programs. The function of all of these activities is to provide a basis for continual improvement of these programs, and to provide a common database for analysis and decision making about the program's effectiveness.

## **3 METHOD**

The researcher used descriptive statistical procedures to analyze the information collected from the respondents to achieve the aims of the study. The researcher used two methods of data collection to gather information from the respondents: quantitative method by retrieved Questionnaire and qualitative method by used Interview tool.

The results of the questionnaire instruments method were analyzed based on frequency distribution, then presented in the form of charts, graphs, and tables for easy visualization. All quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 13.0). The mean, standard deviation and gap analysis as well as the t- test, One-way ANOVA, Chi-Square and Scheffe's test were used to analyze the research questions. The second method used in this study was the qualitative method to analyze the interview and documents tools.

### **3.1 Population and Sample**

The population for this study would indicate that all administrators of basic or post-basic schools, from 1-12, under the directorate of the Muscat Governorate of Education, in the Sultanate of Oman, the total number of school is 143(90 Girls school, 53 Boys school).

The sample for the questionnaire instrument was 250 including approximately 64.2% female and 35.8% male.

Finally, the sample of the interview instrument was obtained from eight schools in the Muscat Governorate of education the total number of interviews was 13 and included principals and assistants as the interviewee subjects.

### **3.2 Data Collection and Analysis**

The data information was related to the design of the study. The design of the effectiveness of the program process employed both the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This mixed

method approach in the collection of data enabled the researcher to confirm findings from different data sources. A sequential data collection was carried out in three phases.

## **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to facilitate this presentation, the findings are organized into several parts to correspond with the information on school administrators' perceptions of the PDP with regards to the research questions of this study. In addition, in the present study, a number of items in the Questionnaire and Interview were taken. Respondents are then asked to express their opinion or attitude towards these statements or propositions. In this way, the researcher was able to ascertain whether the responses to these items or propositions indicated a significant trend of opinion.

### **4.1 Questionnaire findings**

Question number one asks respondents about their viewpoint of the availability level of participation opportunities of school administrators of programs which was organized by the Muscat Governorate of Education in Sultanate of Oman. This question related to the first and second part of questionnaire. The following illustrate the results:

The researcher discovered that the criteria for selection for enrollment onto these programs was fair for the Bachelor's and higher diploma, while the selection for the Master's and PHD degrees was unfair. It is important to note that this finding coincided with the interview results.

Another significant finding that needs to be highlighted here is that the administrators indicated that the scholarship and work leave system to pursue higher education, the opportunity to attend conferences inside and outside the country, the opportunity for exchange visits outside the region and the opportunity to participate in training courses outside the Sultanate of Oman, are all considered crucial among administrators. Results for these items show that they all registered very low levels of agreement in terms of the advantages to be gained from PDP.

Therefore, Data gathered from school administrators indicated that the availability of opportunities on professional development programs would be beneficial if they are cascaded clearly and realistically, but in the Muscat Directorate, they are limited and not on the right track. The principal mentioned to two kinds of programs with opportunities to participate. These were workshops and meetings and others programs inside or outside Muscat such as conferences,, exchange visits, training outside the country and continuing higher education. These unavailable opportunities should be more assessable.

Question number two asks administrators about their perceptions of the effectiveness level of professional development programs. A total of 37 items were used in the measurement of this level. The majority of respondents indicated that the agreement degree was of an average level and 7 items were indicated to be low level.

From the findings it should also be noted that the respondents felt that the planning of professional development programs was crucial in many aspects such as training needs procedure, the weakness of participation of administrators when planning PDP and the absence of no long-term plans for PDP. However, the planning of PDP was considered the first step to gain high-level advantages from it, which was mentioned in the literature review by (Abdul Rahman, 2004), who highlighted four basic administrative functions the first of which is planning where the organization wants to be in the future. Also, according to John & Jill (1998), mentioned that the two elements which affected professional developments were career planning and career management.

Another significant finding that needs to be highlighted here concerns the items which measure the skills and abilities of administrators when attending PDP or the training aim of promoting administrators in this respect. The majority of respondents indicated that the skills such as self-management, communication, making decisions, directing meetings, directing group work and determining training needs were all estimated at the average level in their perception. This major issue further indicated that the objective of PDP was not able to develop their skills and abilities in building the right attitude in order to guide schools effectively.

Also, in this context, the skill of financial management was estimated as low level. The administrators felt that they faced many challenges in obtaining financial assistance when they applied for

professional development projects in their schools. Indeed, many principals feel they do not have adequate knowledge to manage financial resources.

On the other hand, there were numerous items concerning the acquisition of certain abilities on the part of administrators to upgrade their knowledge on this side. The majority of respondents indicated that most of these abilities which were covered by the PDP were weak and needed to be developed or replaced. For example, on the ability to prepare work sheets, respondents displayed a low level for this item and for this reason the researcher discovered that there were weaknesses in the implementation of training at their school because of a lack of skills training.

Therefore, although professional development programs have been enriched to enhance the level of knowledge, skills and abilities of school administrators, some areas in these programs need to be improved in order to enhance all the programs and create more positive learning for the participants.

Another significant finding in the domain of effectiveness of the PDP, is that there were significant differences (.005) in favor of female participants and significant difference (.029) in favor of (1-4) school, as well as significant differences (.017) in favor of principals and assistants holding Bachelor's degrees.

## 4.2 Gap Analysis of the effectiveness level

To find out the gap analysis of effectiveness level the researcher has divided this level into four categories according to the type of item, certain items were looking for effectiveness in programs planning, others abilities, and skills and organization. The following points illustrate the findings of the gap analysis for each element:

### A. Planning

From the below figure 4.1 and the illustration, it was noted that there is a gap in a number of paragraphs, which need more attention when planning and performing the professional development programs in order to enhance the effectiveness of these programs. The findings of the gap in this planning element are as follows:

- Reflect professional role.
- Help me in solving problem.
- Assist in dealing with crisis.
- Help professional creativity.

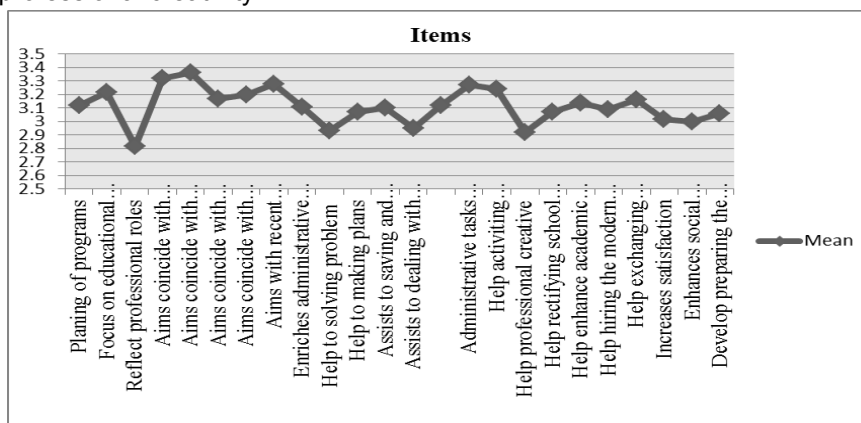


Figure 4.1: Gap Analysis for Planning Level

### B. Abilities

From the below figure 4.2 and the illustration, it was noted that there is also a gap in a number of items related to the ability level which requires more attention when planning and implementing the professional development programs so as to enhance the effectiveness of these programs. The items of this gap are as follows:

- Developing replying formal letter abilities.
- Development in abilities.

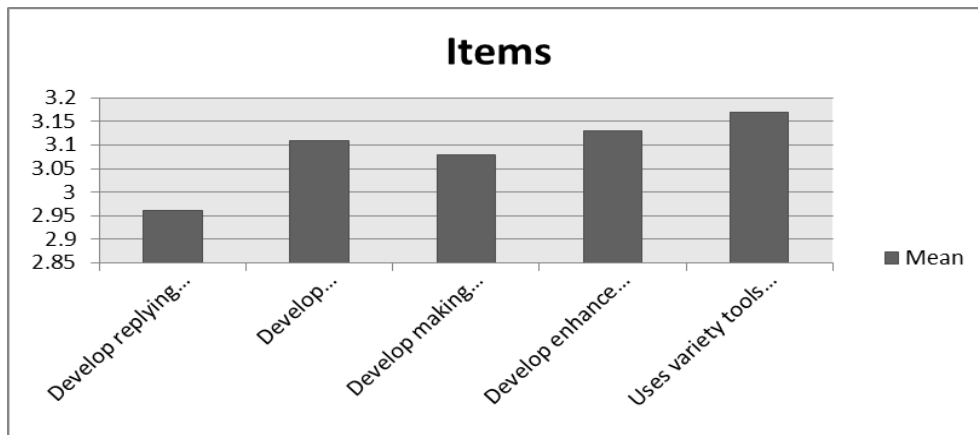


Figure 4.2: Gap Analysis for Ability Level

### C. Skills

From the next figure 4.3 and the illustration, it was noted that there is a gap in two skills which respondents find difficult to achieve in their schools, which need more attention when planning and implementing the professional development programs in order to enhance the effectiveness of these programs. The gaps of this level are as follows:

- Financial management skills.
- Communication skills.

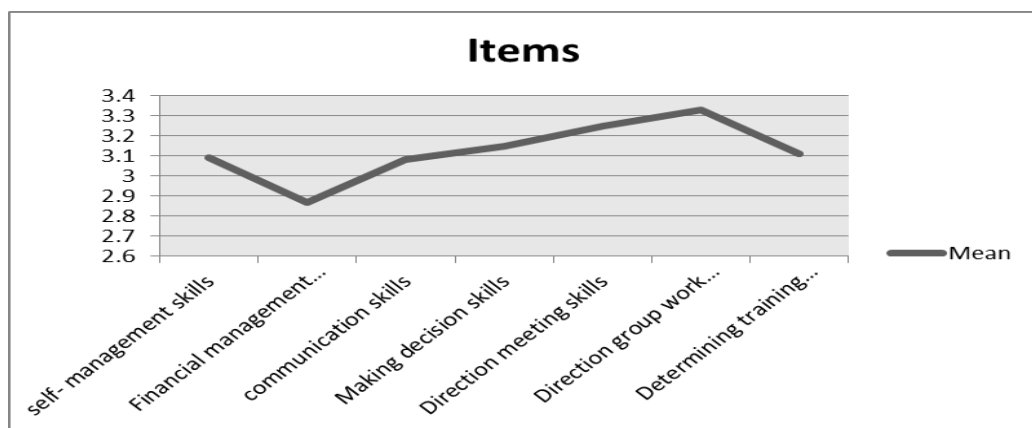


Figure 4.3: Gap Analysis for skills items

### D. Organization Level

From the next figure 4.4 and the illustration, it was noted that there is a gap in a number of items in organization level that require urgent attention when planning and employing the professional development programs so as to enhance the effectiveness of these programs. The following draft illustrates the gaps of organization level: Area of training.

- Training environment.
- Delivery information and knowledge.

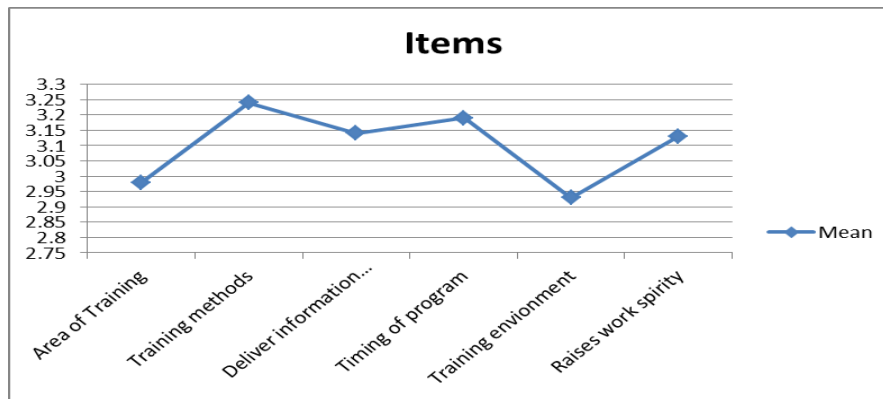


Figure 4.4: Gap Analysis for Organization Level

The next finding is related to the third question regarding the constraints that hinder the effectiveness of professional development programs. School administrators indicated that all agreement degrees of this level were considered high. The findings also show that the major obstacle encountered by the professional development programs is that they did not play any role in functional promotion and that the theoretical side overcomes the applied side. This was because the participants took quite some time to put into practice what was learnt from the PDP.

Furthermore, the researcher also discovered that the use of Internet facilities and participation in functional training was considered to be of high level difficulty on this level. In addition, the goals of functional training did not coincide with most of educational development programs especially for basic and post basic education.

Finally, the researcher discovered that the administrators were given no choice to attend the PDP. Since administrators do not really have the final say, this may lead to their reluctance in attending the program. When administrators are unwilling and yet forced to attend, they will not be able to acquire the knowledge and skills from the programs. Therefore, it is vital to have prior discussions between school administrators and the department in order to choose the right person to attend any PDP.

## 5 INTERVIEW RESULTS

The findings related to interview analysis for the effectiveness of professional development programs which was presented by the Muscat Governorate of Education to school administrators from the point of view for these programs, was indicated to different trends for effectiveness of these programs presented to them.

The data was discipline according to three cycle of school cycle one, cycle two and post basic education, through argument of four themes(availability of opportunities, effectiveness, organization and constraints or challenges), which was mentioned by school administrators.

Data gathered from administrators in cycle one schools indicated that the availability of opportunities on professional development programs are limited and not on the right track. Only in workshops and meetings they were afforded the opportunities to participate, and most of them focused on the competition of cleanliness and hygiene in the school environment or in the learning progress, while other programs inside or outside Muscat such as conferences, exchange visits, training outside the country and continuing higher education were limited opportunities.

Data also revealed that the effectiveness is one of the main objectives of the professional development programs, which lead to modifications, changes, renovations and developments of the administrative work. However, these objectives are not realized from professional development programs presented according to the principals. For example, the effectiveness of meeting is too poor for many of the following reasons mentioned such as, having routine meetings and the same repeated issues every year which have no renovation or development. They do not discuss the school grievances such as weaknesses in reading and follow up of teachers concerning the professional and educational aspect. Thus, the level of motivation to attend the meetings is weak because they do not tackle issues that concern schools. In addition, they do not agree with the administration duties. Most of these programs concentrated on a group of school principals and their new assistant and ignore

the other old assistants, concentrated on the theoretical side. It doesn't concentrate on the techniques of developing teacher's performance and students' progress and their assessment. On the other hands, problem solving, students' progress, teacher's performance and other different administrative skills still encounter difficulties in being implemented in the educational field.

Finding of the professional development programs revealed that lack the appropriate time to organize as they are supposed to be organized at the beginning of the year or in August and at the end of the year. The professional development programs aren't well arranged by the organizers whether they are administrative supervisors or those who are concerned with the professional development programs in the Muscat Directorate. There is no opportunity for the targeted people to specify their training needs as they are supposed to send a form to principals and their assistants to specify their training needs or through activating the training page in the MOE Portal.

Data reflected professional development programs faced many constraints and challenges which influence the program effectiveness such as, qualified trainers and good papers which correlate the theoretical and practical aspects and specify the appropriate time for them, as well as the place are considered challenges encountered by the professional development programs in the Muscat Directorate, cooperation between the departments of Directorate General and attracting experts from universities and educational institutions to provide qualified trainers for training. In addition, the titles of the programs and their objectives and how to specify the training needs are inadequate as the subjects are determined by the trainers responsible for the programs, not according to the trainee's needs. Lastly, they do not carry out and deal with recommendations submitted according to the meetings. Meetings do not achieve the goals they set out to accomplish.

These constraints or challenges were the most important challenges encountered by people working in this field, and how to correlate between the theoretical side and the practical one in the professional development programs. For example, the meetings do not provide solutions to the educational issues. The laws are not properly implemented. Thus, when the school tries to apply the students' learning concepts, it encounters 'hiccups' in improving the performance levels of students. In spite of the professional development programs in this regard and the recurrent meetings, the result is satisfactory with what has been presented during the meeting due to the penalties and the rules in this regard. These relate to the pass and fail laws which depend on the automatic promotion of students in spite of the weak performance levels of students and the infringement of the school rules.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

Overall, a majority of the respondents felt that professional development programs were important and useful. They indicated that the PDP is of significant importance to their jobs and their duties as administrators. At the same time, they requested organizers to be more concerned when implementing PDP. Although, the documents analyzed indicated that there were two kinds of PDP (training & qualification) on the subject of enrollment, these programs were considered the by departments as no special form and most programs still trend on the same direction.

Therefore, although Professional development programs have been enriched to enhance the level of knowledge, skills and abilities of school administrators, there are still certain areas in these programs which require improvement in order to make all objectives in the whole program much more effective, and to create more a positive learning environment for participants in training such as, scholarships and work leave systems in order to continue higher education, an opportunity of attending conferences inside and outside the country, an opportunity for exchange visits outside the region, the opportunity of participating in training courses outside the Sultanate of Oman. Also, the planning of professional development programs because these were pertinent from many angles; for example training needs procedure, weakness of participation of administrators when planning of PDP and there were no long term plans for PDP, although planning of PDP was considered the first step to get high level advantages from it. Nevertheless, from the findings the significance of the availability level is that there were important differences estimated of (0.025) in favor of the female participants.

In short, an evaluation study should be done on various professional development programs, which have been offered to the school administrators, by the general directorates of Education in the Sultanate of Oman, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, so that they would be able to obtain more benefits from effective in-service programs in the future.



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