Implementation of Inclusive Education: An Exploration of Determinants, Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

One of the main goals of contemporary educational paradigms is inclusive education, which seeks to give all students equal access to learning opportunities. Inclusive education, where all students learn together regardless of background or ability is a cornerstone of a just and equitable education system. This paper examines the successive implementation of inclusive education, exploring the factors that determine its success, the challenges that may arise, and the opportunities it presents. Key determinants like leadership, teachers’ competence, mindset and attitude of stakeholders, accessible curriculum, research and innovation, cultural competence, supportive policies, are crucial for building a foundation for inclusion. However, challenges such as lack of teacher training, resource and infrastructure accessibility, require careful consideration and strategic solutions. Beyond overcoming these challenges lie the significant opportunities of inclusive education. By fostering a sense of belonging, collaboration, and respect for diversity, inclusive classrooms benefit all students, leading to improved academic outcomes, stronger social skills, and a more positive learning experience. This exploration of factors, challenges, and opportunities highlights the importance of a successive approach to achieving inclusive education. It is a continuous journey requiring ongoing efforts to create schools where every student feels empowered to thrive.

Keywords: Sucessive Implementation, Inclusive Education, Determinants, Cahlenges and Opprtuinities

Introduction

According to SDG-4 inclusive education means providing quality, equitable, and accessible education for all, including the physically challenged, to ensure sustainable development (Kusimo & Chidozie, 2019). It is an approach to teaching and learning that strives to ensure all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or circumstances, are provided with equal access to quality education within mainstream classrooms. It emphasizes creating supportive and diverse learning environments where every learner feels valued, respected, and included. Inclusive education goes beyond mere integration or placement of students with disabilities or special needs into regular classrooms; it involves adapting teaching methods, curriculum, and classroom environments to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. In this new arrangement, school curriculums, teaching methods, organization, and resources are
expected to be adapted to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their ability can successfully participate in regular classroom activities without any serious discomfort (Adeniyi et al., 2015).

This new approach to education was informed by the World Conference on Education of Children with Special Needs held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994 which provided the standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities. The concept of inclusive education is based on the principle that all children should learn together, whenever possible, regardless of any difficulty or differences they may have, and inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students (UNESCO, 1994).

Needs and Importance of Inclusive Education

Diversity plays a crucial role in enhancing the strength of society when effectively addressed. Inclusive education is crucial for fostering a society that values diversity, promotes equality, and ensures that every individual, regardless of their differences, has access to quality education. The need and importance of inclusive education are paramount in fostering a society that values diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Inclusive education contributes to sustainable development goal 4 (SDG-4) by promoting a common vision of sustainability, identifying competencies needed, and developing appropriate pedagogic and learning strategies (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019). Inclusive education promotes social change, respects human dignity, ensures the active participation of all learners, and fosters an inclusive society through access to education for diverse individuals (Baria, 2023).

Inclusive education addresses barriers to education, such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination, to ensure all children have access to quality education (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). It ensures that every individual, regardless of their background, abilities, or differences, has equal access to quality education. By embracing diversity and providing tailored support and accommodations, inclusive education maximizes the potential of each student and promotes their holistic development. It focuses on promoting the inclusion of learners with disabilities, addressing their needs, and promoting a diverse learning environment (Voltz et al., 2001). Moreover, it cultivates empathy, understanding, and acceptance among students, fostering positive relationships and a sense of belonging within the school community. Inclusive education also prepares students for living and working in a diverse society, equipping them with the skills and attitudes needed to thrive in an inclusive environment. Inclusive education not only provides access to education for all but also fosters skills and attitudes essential for thriving in a diverse and inclusive society (Baria, 2023). It is crucial to recognize every child’s right to education, foster individual differences, and integrate children with special needs into the regular educational system and society (Ivan et al., 2021).

Inclusive education is important for improving educational equity by providing for all children and young people regardless of social, emotional, cultural, intellectual, or linguistic differences or disabilities (Florian et al., 2010). It contributes to a better and more inclusive future for all in society, echoing the hope and calls from various countries in the Asia-Pacific region (Bevan-Brown et al., 2014). Ultimately, inclusive education is not just a legal or ethical imperative but a fundamental aspect of building a more equitable and inclusive society where every individual has the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

Justification of the Study

Keeping in view the importance of inclusive education in present society various efforts have been made at national and international levels for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Despite
numerous efforts, evidence of research revealed that inclusive education remains a challenging goal across the globe (Ainscow, 2005; Ferguson, 2008; Ainscow & Cesar, 2006; Engelbrecht, 2013). Inclusive education remains a challenging goal across the globe, and unless a conscious effort is made to move our thinking and planning from Education for All to Inclusive Education, true universal education will not be achieved (Heung & Grossman, 2007). Haug (2017) stated that no country has yet succeeded in constructing a school system that lives up to the ideals and intentions of inclusion, as defined by different international organizations. Inclusive education remains challenging and almost impossible to achieve, especially in developing countries due to factors like societal attitude, government attitude, infrastructure, and funding (Sijuola & Davidova, 2022). Inclusive education is not satisfactorily implemented in most developing countries due to factors like lack of support services, relevant materials, personnel training, funding structure, and enabling legislation (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). With increasing interest and efforts in various countries the field of inclusive education remains confused about what actions to take to move policy and practice forward (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006).

From the review of previous literature, it is crystal clear that despite numerous efforts inclusive education still faces challenges in successful implementation globally. In that context, it is essential to understand the factors that contribute to the successful adoption and sustainability of inclusive practices which help policymakers and educators to develop effective strategies. This paper examines the successive implementation of inclusive education, exploring the factors that determine its success, the challenges that may arise, and the opportunities it presents. It will be helpful for policymakers and stakeholders to leverage existing resources, support mechanisms, and best practices to advance inclusive education initiatives. However, it is essential to understand how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Determinants/factors for Implementation of Inclusive Education

The determinants of successful inclusive education practices encompass various factors that contribute to creating supportive and effective learning environments for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. The key determinants are as follows;

● **Leadership**

School leaders are considered change agents in promoting inclusive practices and creating a positive school culture. Leadership practice is crucial in gearing education systems towards inclusive values and bringing about sustainable change (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Effective leadership at all levels, including school administrators, district officials, and policymakers, is essential for promoting a culture of inclusion, setting clear goals, and providing the necessary support and resources for successful implementation. Leadership plays a key role in creating and upholding inclusive school practices, promoting attention to diversity, and involving families in the educational process (Crisol-Moya et al., 2022).

● **Teacher Competence and Training**

Well-trained and competent teachers who possess knowledge of inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and classroom management strategies are critical for meeting the diverse needs of students and creating inclusive learning environments. Inclusive education requires teachers to possess specific professional and personal competencies, including attitudes, motivation, and knowledge related to the different learning styles of children with special educational needs (Bukvic, 2014). Inclusive competencies of teachers include the readiness to organize an inclusive educational process, and individually oriented educational routes, provide psychological and pedagogical support for students with disabilities, and
ensure the inclusion of children with disabilities in educational institutions (Kantor et al., 2021; Linker & Yusupova, 2019).

● **Mindset and Attitude**
When stakeholders, including educators, administrators, parents, policymakers, and community members, embrace a positive outlook toward inclusion, they create an environment where all students feel valued and supported. Belief in the inherent worth and potential of every individual drives the commitment to provide equitable opportunities for all learners, regardless of their background or abilities (Summers & Beers, 2019). In essence, the mindset and attitude of stakeholders shape the ethos of inclusive education, ultimately determining its success in fostering diversity, equity, and excellence in learning for all.

● **Collaboration**
Collaboration is a crucial determinant of inclusive education, as it fosters effective partnerships among teachers, parents, and students with and without disabilities, enhancing the overall learning environment as well as shifting focus from student deficits to empowering teachers with the ability to include all students regardless of learning needs (Solone, 2020; Semon et al., 2021). Collaboration among teachers, support staff, families, community members, and relevant stakeholders is crucial for supporting the holistic development of students and addressing their individual needs through coordinated efforts and shared resources. Collaboration among stakeholders fosters the sharing of expertise and resources, enabling them to implement effective inclusive practices. Collaborative actions need to be an essential part of teachers’ work in an inclusive school to construct an inclusive pedagogy and meet the diverse needs of all students (Lekkala et al., 2021).

● **Accessible curriculum and Instructional Materials**
Access to a curriculum that is flexible, adaptable, and accessible to all learners, as well as the availability of appropriate instructional materials and technologies, is essential for ensuring that students can engage with the curriculum and achieve their full potential. When curriculum and instructional materials are designed with accessibility in mind, they accommodate diverse needs and preferences, fostering a learning environment that is inclusive and supportive. Accessible materials not only benefit students with disabilities but also cater to the varied learning modalities of all learners, promoting academic engagement and participation. Different inclusive pedagogical practices like Universal Design for Learning, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Differentiated Instruction, and Assessment can create a learning environment with rich learning opportunities that can be accessible to all learners (Sukhai & Mohler, 2017; Florian, 2015; Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2022).

● **Physical and Social Environment**
An inclusive environment must demonstrate the defining principles of inclusion, not just the physical placement of students with disabilities (Voltz et al., 2001). Creating physically and socially inclusive environments that are welcoming, safe, and supportive for all students promotes a sense of belonging and encourages active participation in learning activities. According to Avramidis & Norwich (2010) educational environment-related variables, such as availability of physical and human support are consistently found to be associated with the attitude of inclusion. A supportive physical environment, including accessible facilities and resources, ensures that all students can fully participate in learning activities regardless of their physical abilities. A positive school climate for inclusive education includes physical and socio-emotional security, supportive relationships, and a school climate that encourages the active participation of all students (Wulan & Sanjay, 2022).
● **Equitable Resource Allocation**

Equity in education is a key determinant of inclusive education, as it involves ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities for all students also equity is the basis of inclusive education (Michelson, 1972 & Ainscow, 2016). Equitable resource allocation may involve providing funding for assistive technologies, specialized personnel such as teachers or aides, and professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their capacity to support diverse learners. By prioritizing equitable resource allocation, schools can mitigate disparities and barriers to learning, promoting an inclusive environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

● **Data-Informed Decision Making**

Collecting and using contextually relevant documents is essential for the success of inclusive education (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Regular data collection, monitoring, and analysis help educators to identify students' strengths and needs, track their progress, and make informed decisions about instructional strategies, interventions, and resource allocation to support inclusive practices.

● **Research in Inclusive Education**

Research in inclusive education is essential for its success, as it provides key areas for improvement and sets out an agenda for future research (Farrell, 2000). Through ongoing research, educators gain insights into effective inclusive practices and interventions, allowing them to better meet the individual needs of students with disabilities or special educational requirements. More qualitative research of high methodological quality is needed in inclusive education to understand students’ views and experiences, it can also contribute to long-term monitoring and understanding of educational processes, supporting schools in self-development in terms of inclusive learning (Bates et al., 2015; Tomkova & Hejilova, 2018).

According to Leeman & Volman (2010), educational research in inclusive education should help teachers reflect on diversity in classroom practices and suggest alternative forms of action and behavior to achieve inclusive education.

● **Innovations in Instructional Practices**

Innovation in instructional methods, assistive technologies, and curriculum design enables educators to create more accessible and engaging learning experiences for all students. Innovation in instructional practice, such as multi-tiered systems of support, universal design for learning, and collaborative instruction can improve the educational outcomes of all students (Sailor, 2015). Kazibroda et al. (2020) stated that innovations in inclusive education are the key factor in its success, with integrated and differentiated approaches being effective in different educational systems.

● **Cultural Competence and Sensitivity**

Cultural competence, defined as awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge of culture, is key to the success of inclusive programs in mental health settings (Dillard et al., 1992). Culturally responsive teaching practices and an understanding of students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and identities are essential for creating inclusive classrooms that honor diversity and promote mutual respect and understanding among students and educators. Educators who possess cultural competence are better equipped to recognize and address the unique needs, perspectives, and experiences of students from different cultural backgrounds, including those from marginalized or underrepresented communities (Rizek, 2023).

● **Policy Support**

Success in implementing inclusive education depends on educational policy measures and changes in the structure of the teaching process and school system (Ratkovic & Hebib, 2018). Sustainable, realistic, and implementable policy support for inclusive education can result in high-quality education for all (Forlin,
Challenges in Implementation of Inclusive Education

● **Lack of teacher training and support**
  Lack of teacher training and support poses a significant challenge to the implementation of inclusive education (Arnaiz-Sanchez et al., 2023; & Abrol, 2023). Teachers often struggle due to insufficient preparation in addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities, leading to barriers to creating truly inclusive learning environments. Existing teacher education programs are criticized for not adequately equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to cater to students with diverse needs effectively. Reports indicate that despite training programs and policy reforms, teachers still face challenges in identifying learners with learning barriers in inclusive classrooms, highlighting the ongoing issue of inadequate support and training.

● **Resource constraints**
  Resource constraints pose a significant challenge to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Jurs et al., 2023; & Andrews et al., 2011). The lack of resources, including support from society, negative attitudes from teachers, and inadequate physical resources in school, hinders the effective implementation of inclusive education (Mazuruse et al., 2022). In South Africa, where inclusive education is still in its early stages, under-resourced schools struggle to accommodate learners with diverse needs, impacting the quality of teaching and learning (Garcia-Barrea, 2022).

● **Infrastructure and accessibility**
  Infrastructure and accessibility pose significant challenges to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Sijuola & Davidova, 2022). In developing countries like India and Indonesia, inadequate infrastructure, including inaccessible physical environments in schools, hinders the effective inclusion of children with disabilities (Prathama et al., 2022; & Lister et al., 2022). The lack of accessible resources and the difficulty in modifying the curriculum to cater to diverse needs further exacerbate the situation. Overcoming these challenges requires training programs for teachers, improved infrastructure, and better collaboration with relevant stakeholders to create an environment conducive to successful inclusive education implementation.

● **Curriculum adaptation**
  Curriculum adaptation poses a significant challenge to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Widiyawati et al., 2022 & Pillay, 2022). Teachers face obstacles in modifying and adapting the curriculum to cater to the diverse needs of students, especially those with special educational requirements. Challenges include the lack of accessibility for physically disabled individuals, insufficient modifications in science subjects, and inadequate training for teachers in adapting materials for learners with disabilities. The study emphasizes the importance of tailored professional development activities for teachers to enhance their skills in curriculum modification and adaptation, ensuring that all students benefit from
inclusive education. Addressing these challenges through proper training, awareness campaigns, and adherence to guidelines is crucial for the effective implementation of inclusive education programs.

- **Social Integration and Acceptance**
Social integration and acceptance indeed pose significant challenges to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Svraka et al., 2022; Furrer, 2023; & Sijuola & Davidova, 2022). Studies highlight that children with special educational needs often face reduced social participation, fewer interactions, and lower acceptance in inclusive settings. Teacher’s attitudes play a crucial role in fostering social interactions and acceptance, particularly for children with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, societal attitudes, negative teacher perceptions, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of support contribute to the challenges faced in implementing inclusive education. Overcoming these obstacles requires concerted efforts from teachers, parents, institutions, and policymakers to promote a more inclusive and accepting environment, emphasizing the importance of social integration for the success of inclusive education initiatives.

- **Parental Engagement and Support**
Parental engagement and support play a crucial role in the successful implementation of inclusive education (Jurs et al., 2023; & Virani & Ali, 2022). Challenges such as negative attitudes among parents and teachers towards inclusive education can hinder its progress. Parent-teacher collaborations based on trust and understanding are essential for the benefit of students, especially those with disabilities in inclusive settings. Inclusive education requires responsible school management and enhanced parent-teacher relationships. Additionally, parental involvement in immigrant learner’s education is vital, but challenges like language barriers and cultural conflicts may arise, necessitating strategies like training for effective communication and regular evaluation of parental support programs. Therefore, addressing these challenges through awareness programs, training initiatives, and fostering positive relationships between parents and teachers is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

- **Legal and Policy Framework**
Legal and Policy Frameworks indeed pose challenges to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Paiva et al., 2023; & Ferreira & Reis-Jorge, 2022). In Portugal, the introduction of new legislation in 2018 aimed at inclusive education necessitates evaluation by teachers for effective implementation (Jurs et al., 2023). Similarly, in the broader context of inclusive education, the responsibility for inclusion is shared among various stakeholders, including policymakers and authorities, making legal and policy frameworks crucial (Lydia & Annie, 2022). Challenges such as lack of resources, acceptance by institutions, and inadequate support measures hinder the meaningful and effective implementation of inclusive education (Sharma & Mullick, 2020).

- **Assessment and Evaluation**
Assessment and evaluation pose significant challenges to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Husna et al., 2023; & Pillai & Devamanokari, 2023). Regular teachers face difficulties in assessing students with special needs, struggling with developing appropriate assessment methods, and coordinating with special education teachers (Sijuola et al., 2002). The lack of inclusive elements in school plans, inadequate curriculum adjustments, unprepared teachers, inappropriate facilities, and non-compliant assessment criteria further hinder the implementation of inclusive education. Additionally, societal attitudes, government apathy, poor infrastructure, insufficient funding, and inadequate teacher training programs contribute to the obstacles in achieving inclusive education, especially in developing countries.
• Cultural and linguistic Diversity
Cultural and linguistic diversity poses significant challenges to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Giavrimis, 2023). Teachers often lack the necessary sensitivity, knowledge, and skills to effectively address cultural diversity in the classroom, leading to disadvantages for students from migrant backgrounds. In Greece, where rapid socio-demographic changes have occurred due to the financial crisis and an influx of refugees, inclusive practices face obstacles in schools, affecting students with diverse ethnocultural backgrounds and special educational needs. While some teachers in Greece positively approach immigrant/refugee students, others exhibit negative attitudes influenced by ethnocentric elements, highlighting the need for more inclusive educational policies and practices that transcend mainstream cultural elements and promote multilingualism and diversity of social identities. The global movement towards inclusive education emphasizes the Importance of addressing cultural and linguistic diversity to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students.

Opportunities in Implementation of Inclusive Education
• Promoting diversity and social cohesion
Inclusive education promotes diversity and social cohesion by fostering acceptance, cross-group friendships, psychological and social adjustment, and respect for all students' rights, thereby enhancing learning and facilitating social transformation (Juvonen et al., 2019; Rayner, 2009; Nishina et al., 2019; Pagani et al., 2014; Hymel & Katz, 2019; Alexiu & Sorde, 2011; Shaeffer, 2019; & Hyde, 2019). And it’s successful implementation benefits all students, enhancing social and academic outcomes, and contributing to a more equitable and democratic society(Burstein et al., 2004; Juvonen et al., 2019; Adair, 2010; Acedo et al., 2008; Hymel & Katz, 2019; Nishina et al., 2019; Shaeffer., 2019; & Hyde, 2019)

• Enhancing Learning Outcome
Research has shown that inclusive education can lead to improved academic achievement and higher levels of engagement for all students (Janney & Snell, 2006; Choi et al., 2020; Szumski et al., 2017; & Hockings et al., 2007). It generally enhances learning outcomes for all students by promoting participation, respect for diversity, and modifying teaching methods to accommodate various needs, although there are instances where it may not benefit everyone (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Sailor., 2015; Roldan et al., 2021; Wood., 2015; & Sagun-Ongtangcoen et al., 2019).

• Supporting personalized learning
Inclusive education encourages educators to use diverse teaching strategies and approaches to meet the individual needs of students. it supports personalized learning experiences by using general education contexts, accommodating individual needs, incorporating new technologies, and providing professional support to meet the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities (Hemalata., 2021; Karagianni & Drigas, 2023; Arthur-Kelly & Foreman, 2020; & Gasanova.,2022).

• Building empathy and social skills
Interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds and abilities in inclusive settings helps students develop empathy, compassion, and social skills by fostering connections among diverse students and promoting positive relationships and social intelligence (Pooja., 2018; Juvonen et al.,2019; McGuire & Meadan, 2022; Olais-Govea et al., 2022, Hamafyelto et al., 2018; Mahabbati et al., 2019; Badia et al., 2019; & Fisher & Meyer et al., 2002).In that manner, they learn to appreciate differences, communicate effectively, and collaborate with others, which are essential skills for success in an increasingly diverse world.
• **Fostering inclusion and belonging**

Inclusive education creates environments where all students feel valued, respected, and included. Its successive implementation fosters inclusion and belonging by promoting supportive policies, positive behavior support systems, co-teaching, self-determination, and challenging traditional educational norms (Shogren et al., 2015; Renzaglia et al., 2003; Nunan et al., 2000; Gous et al., 2014; Kefallinou et al., 2020; & Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). This sense of belonging enhances students’ self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being, leading to a positive school experience and greater motivation to learn (Choi, 2020; Roffey, 2013; & Stojanovic & Popovic-Citic, 2022).

• **Preparing for real-world diversity**

Inclusive education prepares students for life in a diverse society and workforce by promoting psychological and social adjustment, enhancing learning, fostering acceptance and respect for diversity, and preparing educators to implement inclusive practices effectively (Nishina et al., 2019; Hymel & Katz, 2019; Thompson & Brewster, 2022; Volker et al., 2023; & Lim & Irelan, 2001). Inclusive education exposes students to different perspectives, experiences, and cultures (Cumming et al.,2018; Lim & Irelan, 2001), which equips them with the skills and attitudes needed to navigate and thrive in a globalized world where diversity is the norm (Rutkowski et al., 2014; & Doran & Doran, 2021).

• **Promoting equity and social justice**

Inclusive education is rooted in principles of equity and social justice, aiming to ensure equal opportunities and access to education for all students. By addressing barriers to learning and participation, inclusive education helps reduce disparities and promote fairness in education (Astuti & Astuti, 2020; Shaeffer, 2019; & Mena & Waitoller, 2022).

• **Supporting parental involvement**

Research studies suggest that inclusive education fosters collaboration among educators, families, and communities, enhancing student learning, emotional intelligence, social relationships, and well-being through various strategies and models of instruction (Munoz-Martinez et al., 2020; Anney & Snell, 2006; Silverman et al., 2010; & Ispas, 2019). Parental involvement in education is consistently associated with positive academic outcomes, skill and knowledge development, and stronger school-family partnerships across various educational stages and contexts (Jeynes et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; & Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017).

• **Promoting innovation and creativity**

Inclusive education promotes innovation and creativity in students by valuing autonomy, and collaborative relationships, and providing supportive structures, as well as through specific teaching methods and principles that encourage creative thinking and interdisciplinary connections (Davis, 2013; Arrazola & Bozalongo, 2014 & Manko, 2020).

**Conclusion**

The journey of inclusive education is both complex and rewarding, requiring careful attention to various factors, challenges, and opportunities. Effective implementation of inclusive education hinges on effective leadership, competent teachers, supportive policies, accessible curriculum, and a culture of collaboration and respect for diversity. While challenges such as inadequate teacher training and resource accessibility exist, they can be addressed through strategic solutions and concerted efforts. Moreover, the benefits of inclusive education extend beyond academic outcomes to encompass stronger social skills and a more positive learning experience for all students. Ultimately, achieving inclusive education is a
continuous journey that demands ongoing dedication and commitment from all stakeholders. By embracing inclusivity, we can create learning environments where every student feels valued and empowered to thrive, thus a more equitable education system.

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