



Parenting Style, Self-Esteem and Student Performance in the United Arab Emirates

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Citation

Alsheikh, N., Parameswaran, G, & Elhoweris, H. (2010). Parenting Style, Self-Esteem and Student Performance in the United Arab Emirates. *Current Issues in Education*, 13(1). Retrieved from <http://cie.asu.edu/>

Abstract

The impact of parenting styles on 5-8th grade students' performance and self-esteem was analyzed within a sample of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) public school children. A sample of 162 children (50% boys, 50% girls) reported on their parents' child-rearing practices. Parenting styles were classified into one of three groups (autonomy granting, demandingness, or responsiveness). The results show that demandingness was found to have a significant impact on GPA scores. Mothers' interactions with children were dependent on both the gender of the child and the age of the child. Factor analysis results suggested that Family Cohesion and Effort were positively related to school performance and Self-autonomy was negatively related to school performance. Self-esteem was not significantly related to any of the variables studied.

Keywords: Parenting Style, UAE students, Self-esteem, Student Performance, Arab Students, Primary School, Early adolescence, secondary school, Gender, GPA,

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Current Issues in Education

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Introduction

The conceptualization of parenting styles as a way to categorize and measure the quality and type of interaction between parents and children began with the pioneering research by Baumrind (1971). She noticed that parents varied in their interactions with children along 2 major dimensions – warmth and demandingness. Her original framework could place most parental interactions along a 2-way axis, with one axis representing warmth from warm to cold and one axis representing demandingness, ranging from low to high. She thus classified parent-child interactions into 4 types: a) authoritarian: the relationship was characterized by lack of warmth and high demandingness; b) authoritative: the relationship is characterized by high warmth and high demandingness; c) permissive: the relationship is characterized by high warmth and low demandingness; d) neglectful: the relationship is characterized by lack of warmth and low demandingness (Baumrind, 1989, 1991; Cohen & Rice, 1997; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Researchers added another dimension to Baumrind’s original framework. Another category called it ‘Autonomy granting’ was added. Democratic parents encourage their children to be autonomous without being overprotective while authoritarian parents are over-protective (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch and Darling, 1992). There have been several variations of this 3–dimensional model proposed by other North American researchers, which have been used to examine parenting and parent child relationships in other parts of the world. In some cases, the parent child relationship atmosphere is highlighted (Stevenson, Chen & Uttal, 1990) and in other cases, parent child relationship behaviors are emphasized and measured (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). In studies emphasizing the climate of the relationship, global questions capturing the relationship in a

variety of situation are asked when the behaviors are emphasized; particular parental responses to specific situations are enquired about. The relationship between the two remains strong in most studies indicating that they are measuring similar constructs (e.g., Lee, Daniels & Kissinger, 2006)

There have been many studies attempting to substantiate the positive impact of authoritative parenting on various indicators of child development and the negative impact of the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles on children's functioning (Cohen, Richardson, and LaBree, 1994; Epstein, 2001; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994), i.e., self-esteem (Robin & Foster, 1989), academic performance (Dornbusch, et al., 1987; Paulson, 1994), emotional maturity (Lamborn, et al., 1991), tobacco use (Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999; Fleming, Kim, Harachi, & Catalano, 2002), drug use and delinquency (Baumrind, 1989, 1991; Jackson, Henricksen, & Dickenson, 1997; Tomlinson, 1991), and alcohol use (Johnson & Padina, 1991). Other researchers have found that parental style is related to the frequency of adolescent injuries (Bijur, Kurzon, Hamelsky, & Power, 1991) and negative adolescent identity (Petersen, 1993).

Results from studies that attempt to relate parental styles and child and adolescent academic and social behavior and identity have been mixed and the effect sizes vary widely depending on the gender of the parent or a care-giver, gender, age and temperament of the child and the socio-economic status of the family (Harris, 2002). For instance, Conrade & Ho (2001) found that mothers' parenting style had a bigger impact on child performance in school while Bronte-Tinkew, Moore and Carrano (2006) found that fathers' emotional responsiveness was more highly related to children's performance. In some studies girls are

affected both positively and negatively by parenting style differences among parents while in others boys are more negatively or positively affected by parenting styles (Conrade et al., 2001; Lee, et al., 2006).

Perhaps, the most damaging to the current framework of parenting styles and its impact on children are the findings of parent child relationships and their impact on children in non-western societies. In a study conducted within the USA, it was found that Hmong children are less affected by variations in parental behavior in terms of their academic performance and frequency of engaging in risky behavior as compared to European American children (Supple & Small, 2006).

One of the contexts where the parenting style theory has been widely tested for validity is in China. It was found that in China, authoritarian parenting was positively related to children's performance in school while there was no similar positive impact for authoritative parenting and permissive parenting styles (e.g., Chao, 1994; Juan & Larry, 2004; Lamm & Keller, 2007). Chao (1994, p. 1112) proposed that Chinese parenting style involves the Confucian concept of 'chiao shu' which refers to training in culturally appropriate behaviors and 'guan' which means love and governing. Chinese parenting involves being very strict and maintaining a high level of control, so that children can learn to value social hierarchy and discipline and at the same time communicating real parental care about the child. School success is highly valued in Chinese society and children and parents both valued the control that parents exerted over their children in matters related to academic life (Gorman, 1998; Quoss and Zhao, 1995). However, even in the Chinese context, the effects of authoritarian parenting were rarely consistent. In studies conducted with Chinese immigrant families in the USA, no difference was observed between Chinese

American families and European American parents with regards to their parenting styles (Kelly & Tseng, 1992; Lin & Fu, 1990). Additionally, in a study conducted with children of Chinese origin in Hong Kong, Tam and Lam (2003) found that authoritative and permissive parenting had similar impact on children's academic performance while authoritarian parenting was no different from neglectful parenting in terms of the impact on children.

Academic achievement was the most investigated variable among school-related variables. For example, Leung, Lau & Lam (1998) found academic achievement was positively related to general authoritarianism in a Hong Kong adolescent's sample, while authoritative parenting style was found to be unrelated to the grades of Hong Kong adolescents but positively related to the grades of European American and Australian adolescents. In another study, Park & Bauer (2002) found that a positive relationship between authoritative parenting style and academic achievement exists only for the majority group (European Americans), but not for Latinos, African-Americans, or Asian-Americans (Christina, 2008; Odubote, 2008; Park & Bauer, 2002). Blair and Qian (1998) found parental control was positively related to school performance of Chinese adolescents. On the other hand, Chao (2001) found that first-generation Chinese youth from authoritative families were not better off in school than their counterparts from authoritarian families, whereas European American adolescents from authoritative families performed better in school than those European American youth from authoritarian families. Additionally, authoritative parenting had consistently more positive effects on both school grades and school effort for European Americans compared to first-generation Chinese. All this may suggest that authoritarian parenting style is not commonly associated with negative adolescent outcomes, especially when studying non-Caucasian samples. Furthermore, positive adolescent outcomes have been

associated with authoritarian parenting style in some Asian samples whereas positive effects have been found with authoritarian parenting style in some studies involving Asian and other non-Caucasian samples.

One of the classic measures of adolescent adjustment in parenting studies is the self-esteem (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Several studies have explored the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem. For instance, in a study that investigated the impact of parenting styles on adolescents' self-esteem and internalization of values in Spain, Martinez and Garcia (2007) found that adolescents of indulgent parents show highest scores in self-esteem whereas adolescents from authoritarian parents obtain the worst results. Several other researchers have stressed the importance of parenting styles in children's internalization of social values (Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000; Martínez, García, & Yubero, 2007). These researchers recommended in taking into account self esteem among other variables of psychological adjustment, because self-esteem entails an internalization of values, and the lack there of could lead to the impediment for such internalization.

Studies are now being conducted in other non-western cultural contexts to explore the issue of the impact of parenting styles on children's academic performance and other child outcomes. There are very few studies exploring the relationship between parenting styles and child outcomes in the Islamic world. In a study conducted in Egypt (Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie & Farah, 2006), the researchers found that for Arab youth, the authoritative and authoritarian parenting style both had a positive impact on children's mental health. The consistency of parenting was more predictive of the mental health status of the child as compared to the type of parenting style itself. The authors posit that in cultures where

authoritarian parenting is the norm, there are no negative effects of the authoritarian parenting style.

The current study hopes to add to our knowledge base on the impact of parenting in the Arab World as measured by the mothers' parenting style questionnaire, administered to children and children's development as measured by the GPA scores acquired by children in school and their self-esteem. It is hypothesized that the scores on the mothers' parenting style questionnaire will be related to children's GPA scores and self-esteem.

In the UAE, parents' concept of the ideal child is closely related to traditional values in Islamic culture: respect for elders, good manners, good academic outcomes, and self discipline. Generally, in Islamic societies parenting involves being very strict. The belief is that parents must be authoritarian to maintain a high level of control so that children can learn to value disciplines and social hierarchy.

Method

Participants Our sampling frame consisted of a complete list of all the UAE elementary and secondary public schools including boys and girls schools. Identification of participants followed the guidelines of the stratified cluster sampling technique according to gender and geographical location. A total of fourteen elementary and secondary schools (7 boys' schools & 7 girls' schools) from the seven emirates were included in this study. Classes were selected randomly from these schools. A total of 162 United Arab Emirates children who attending the UAE public schools were included in this study. The children were selected from grades 5, 6, 7 and 8. The number of participants in each grade level was: 18, 85, 26 and 32 respectively. There were about equal numbers of girls and boys in each grade. All participants were Muslim, middle-class and lived in urban areas.

Instruments i) Parental Style Inventory II (PSI-II): The scale was adapted for the purpose of this study. This scale was designed to assess the construct of parenting style independently of parenting practice (Lefebvre, 2004). It consisted of 36 items; twelve items for each parenting style dimension, namely, autonomy-granting, demandingness and responsiveness. Participants had a choice of circling a scale from one to five, one symbolizing disagreement with the statement and five depicting high agreement with the statement. The inter-item reliability of the PSI- II is adequate for this study ($r = .78$). Additionally, the PSI-II has adequate internal consistency, variability, and predictive validity. Based on the scores on the scale participants' mothers' parenting styles were classified into four categories: Authoritative, where the mother demonstrated democratic interaction patterns with the child, Authoritarian, where the parent was autocratic and cold with the child, permissive, where the parent was laissez-faire and finally, Neglectful, where the mother had all but abandoned the child.

ii) Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale: The scale was adapted for the purpose of this study. The scale consists of 10 positive and negative self-appraisal statements rated on a 4-point Likert scale format from 1 (strong disagree) to 4 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). The reliability and validity of the scale are both adequate. iii) Self-reported GPA score by the student: Students were asked to report their current cumulative GPA scores. The reported GPA scores range between 1-4 points. The overall GPA mean score is 2.85 (SD = 1.7) as reported by the participants of this study.

Procedures

Participants were selected using the stratified random sampling technique. Fourteen school principals who represented the seven Emirates of the researchers' interest were

contacted and agreed to participate in the study. Information about the study and a thank-you letter from the researchers were sent via e-mail to the principals of all the schools. Principals were also asked in the letter if the researchers could come at the beginning or after a class to collect the data. Most principals preferred that researchers come at the end of the class to collect the data. All students who are enrolled in the selected classes took part in the study. The first and the third author visited each classroom and administered the questionnaire to each child individually. The investigators read each question out loud and wrote down the response.

Results

Results are reported as significant when the p-value is less than .05 for each relationship for all of the statistical computations that were performed. Table 1 depicts the bivariate correlations of the parental dimensions of Autonomy, Responsiveness, Demandingness, and mothers' parenting style with children's self-esteem, and their overall academic performance in the classroom. There were only two relationships that were significant with respect to either of the outcome variables. Demandingness was significantly related to overall academic performance. The more demanding the parents were, the better the performance of the child in school ($r = .29$). Gender was significantly correlated with GPA score. Boys performed better in school than girls ($r = .53$). Self-esteem was not significantly related to any of the variables.

The student's gender and age were significantly correlated to the mother's parenting styles. In other words, parents' interactions with children were dependent on both the gender of the child and the age of the child. Autonomy-granting and demandingness by parents was significantly related to the age of the child. The older the child, the more autonomy parents

offered the child ($r = .20$) and the more demanding parents were of the child ($r = .23$).

Responsiveness was significantly correlated with the gender of the child. Parents were more responsive to girls as compared with boys ($r = .39$).

Having transformed each of the independent parental-style dimensions into four banded categories by the standard deviation change on each dimensional score, a 4 (responsiveness) x 4 (demandingness) x 4 (autonomy-granting) MANOVA was conducted using grades and self-esteem scores as dependent variables. Responsiveness and Autonomy-granting were not found to significantly affect the dependent variable scores. Demandingness was found to have a significant impact on GPA scores ($F = 3.45$, $p < .05$) but the relationship between demandingness and self-esteem was not significant.

A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that parents who scored very high on demandingness (4.35 or above on a scale of 5) had children who had significantly better grades than parents who scored less than 4.34 on demandingness. However, there was no difference between the GPA scores of children who reported that their parents made very few demands on them (less than 3.03) and children who reported that their parents had relatively higher expectations of them (between 3.04 and 4.34). The average GPA score for children in the highest demandingness group was 2.36 out of 3.0. The average grade for children of parents in the other three demandingness groups were 1.77, 2.0 and 1.8 respectively.

Finally, a factor analysis was conducted using the items in the parental style questionnaire. This statistical technique aims to explain the most amount of common variance in a correlation matrix using the least amount of variables possible. Since the study was conducted in a different cultural context, the items may not always hold the same meaning for respondents in the UAE that they hold for respondents in the U.S. where the

questionnaire has been used the most. The questionnaire has been used mostly with middle class Caucasian students and less often with other children, even within the U.S. In this sample of 162 children the Kaiser- Meyer-Olkins was .68, which was greater than .5, indicating that this was a sufficient enough sample to conduct a factor analysis. Initial principals-component extraction yielded a total of ten factors, which accounted for 69.56 % of the total variation. However, a scree plot analysis suggested retaining three of the variables. The factors were analyzed after an orthogonal rotation with varimax with Kaiser Normalization method. The first factor with an eigenvalue of 6.7, we called Family Cohesion, accounted for 21 % of the variation. The Family cohesion variable involved items such as, “when my family does things together, she expects me to come”. The second factor with an eigenvalue of 3.2, we called self-autonomy, accounted for 10 % of the total variation. The Self-autonomy factor included statements such as, “My mother encourages me to think for myself”. The third factor with an eigenvalue of 2.1, which we called Effort, accounted for 7 % of the variation. The Effort factor included statements such as “My mother sets high standards for me to meet.”

The scores from the three factors that we derived from the factor analysis procedure were correlated with GPA scores and self-esteem. Family Cohesion correlated significantly with GPA scores ($r = .33$) but not self-esteem. Effort was related to grade ($r = .16$) and to self-esteem ($r = .15$). Self-autonomy was correlated negatively with GPA scores ($r = -.22$) but did not exhibit any relationship with self-esteem.

Discussion

The impact of parenting style on 5-8th grade students' academic performance and self-esteem was analyzed within a sample of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) public school

children. A sample of 162 children (50% boys, 50% girls) reported on their mothers' child-rearing practices. The PSI-II and the Rosenberg self-esteem scales were administered to children along with their self-reported GPA scores. Parents' styles were classified into one of three groups (autonomy granting, demandingness, or responsiveness). The results show that demandingness was found to have a significant impact on GPA scores. Both gender and age were significantly related to parenting styles. Thus mothers interacted differently with their children based on the age of the child and the gender of the child. Factor analysis results suggested that Family Cohesion and Effort were positively related to school performance and Self-autonomy was negatively related to school performance. Self-esteem was not significantly related to any of the variables studied.

Of the three dimensions of parenting, only the demandingness measure was correlated positively with GPA scores. The results of this study indicated that children of parents who had high expectations from them performed better in school than children whose parents had low expectations from them. When each parental style dimension was transformed into 4 discrete categories with each category about one standard deviation from each other, it was found that only children with the highest parental demandingness score performed significantly better than the others; the grades of children who came from the other three bands of scores did not do significantly better than each other. Thus increasing parental expectations from children did not necessarily translate itself into better grades. It is also unclear as to what the direction of the relationship is, since parents who have high expectations in school for their children may simply be reacting to the high achievement exhibited by the students.

Gender was correlated significantly to the GPA scores earned by the students. Boys did significantly better than girls. This trend has been replicated in other cultural contexts. Sadker and Sadker (1995) bemoaned the significant hurdles facing girls in American schools, outlining the many ways in which girls and women are discriminated against in educational institutions. This practice may have resulted in girls achieving less than their potential especially in areas that are considered masculine like science and math.

Gender and age were both related to parenting as measured by the mothers' parenting style questionnaire. Just as in studies in other cultural contexts, the older the child was the more autonomy mothers granted the child. This substantiates the notion that parenting style is not a stable quality exhibited by parents but is often fluid and responding to the changing nature of the child. Parents were more demanding of children as they got older as well. In traditional Islamic societies, children are perceived to be connected to other members of their families and the larger community. Along with increased autonomy also comes increasing responsibility and demands to prove they are capable of fulfilling their obligations to their parents and other family members. The fact that age and gender were both related to mothers' parenting styles in this study corroborate the findings from previous research (e.g., Conrade et al., 2001; Lee, et al., 2006).

Parental responsiveness was related to the gender of the child; girls perceived parents to be more responsive to them as compared to boys. Again, this phenomenon is exhibited in other cultural contexts as well. Researchers who have studied parenting styles and its impact on school performance argue that the more responsive a parent is, the better the performance of the child should be in school (Baumrind, 1989; Cohen & Rice, 1997). A counter argument to the above reasoning is that there is a lot of evidence to show that parents respond to girls

verbally and non-verbally more often and faster than they respond to boys (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Tomlinson, 1991). Yet, their school achievement typically lags behind boys. One reason for the contradiction is that girls are taught to view themselves relationally with regard to other people and increased parental responsiveness to their needs advances that aim. However, it does not lead to better performance in school because school achievement is essentially an individualistic endeavor and makes girls alienated and less connected in the process. In traditional societies this phenomenon may be exacerbated because a girls' identity may be tied up with perceiving herself as a sustainer of other people and not towards her own growth.

Additionally, a factor analysis was conducted using all of the items on the parenting scale. The rationale for conducting the factor analysis is that often questions in surveys that may seem to have obvious and straightforward meanings to researchers in one cultural context may be read very differently by participants in another cultural context. Thus a statement like, "my mother respects my privacy" may indicate a sense of trust in middle White class society while it may indicate neglect in another culture. Three major factors emerged from the analysis. Family cohesion had the most number of items (8 items) and it was reflected in statements that had to do with activities performed with one's parent and the importance that parents gave to it. Some of the statements were not part of the original 15-item scale (PSI-II). It had the highest correlation with self-reported GPA scores as well ($r = .33$). Children who perceived their family as being important and closely knit had higher GPA scores than children who did not. The family is the center of one's relational life in traditional Islamic societies. Children spend a lot of time with the adults in their families even as they turn into adolescence. As this study illustrates, the expectation that they are

going to follow family rules, have strict codes of behavior around family members and do chores for the family appears to influence school performance in a positive fashion. These have not been studied in terms of their relationship with grades in the western context.

High self-autonomy was negatively correlated with GPA scores. This parental dimension had items similar to autonomy granting as conceived of in the original scale. But it had other items that are not part of the original scale, i.e., “My mother encourages me to talk to her honestly”. The finding that self-autonomy was not positively related to school performance is contradictory to what has been found in studies in western contexts. Perhaps children’s performance in school in the UAE is heavily influenced by the obligations that they feel towards their families to make them proud. In families where the child is not allowed to have their own voice, the child may decide that school is not very important to them and may not make much effort to do well.

Finally, Effort was related positively to GPA scores but to a lesser extent than did Family Cohesion. Effort included a number of items that were not included in the original scale, i.e., “My mother pushes me to do my best in whatever I do”. In several studies, it has been found that Asian cultures value effort more than they do ability. When children are asked to explain success and failure in vignettes that were posed to them, they spontaneously chose effort as an explanation rather than ability even when it contradicted reality (Parameswaran & Hom, 2001). The finding in this study perhaps reflected the attributional framework that the child participants in this study used. In other words, successful children in school may perceive their parents to be more supportive of their efforts than children who do not do well in school.

Thus in this study, of the traditional parental style dimensions (demandingness, autonomy-granting and warmth), only demandingness appears to significantly affect child outcomes if child outcomes is operationalized as school performance. The original parenting styles questionnaire as conceived by Baumrind was mainly used with white middle class children. Our study explored parenting styles among children in the United Arab Emirates. Examining the parental behaviors that related to school achievement among the sample in this study, we found a very different group of variables that seemed to relate to school performance. Factor analysis with the questionnaire seems to suggest that, Family Cohesion and Effort were positively related to GPA scores and Self- autonomy was negatively related to GPA scores.

Results from studies from “non-western” cultures substantiate the importance of the extended family in children's lives and their school achievement (Chao, 2001; Christina, 2008). In collectivistic societies, the feeling of oneness to the larger group prevents one wanting to stand out from other individuals in any way. Thus too high a self-esteem is discouraged and self-disparagement is encouraged by adults in the familial group. Even when children exhibit increased effort it is for the good of one's familial group and it is less about exhibiting one's own prowess. In cultural groups where one's identity is so tied to the larger cultural group that one belongs, it is not surprising that increased feelings of cohesion with the family leads to better performance in school.

A very interesting problem posed by the outcomes of this study is the apparent disconnectedness of self-esteem to any of the variables we studied unlike previous research (e.g., Juan & Larry, 2004; Martinez & Garcia, 2007; Robin & Foster, 1989). However, previous studies have found that higher self-esteem is not necessarily a positive force in

many cultures. Among marginalized and disadvantaged communities in the USA, members of ‘gangs’ and other deviant groups tend to have higher self-esteem than other children in the community. In several traditional cultures, self-depreciating behavior is considered appropriate in order for members to demonstrate their solidarity with the group (Chao, 1994; Martinez, Garcia & Yubero, 2007). The items used to measure self-esteem as conceived by western researchers may be inadequate to capture respect for oneself as construed by members of a traditional Islamic community. Thus we may need to come up with a more culturally sensitive test in order to capture this construct in the UAE.

There were some limitations to this study. The parenting style of mothers alone was examined and not that of fathers. The gender of the parent has been found to have an important mediating effect of mothers’ style on the child. Mothers were not interviewed nor were observations conducted in order to incorporate the children’s reports with actual behavior. The grades of the children were self-reported and not reported by school personnel and hence they may have been inaccurate.

There are potentially exciting questions that a future study may be able to answer. How might parental behaviors vary across cultures as parents attempt to develop bonds with their children? What are the familial determinants of school performance in an affluent but traditional society?

Table 1: Correlation between selected variables in the study:

Correlation between selected variables in the study:

	Age	Gender	Self-esteem	GPA	Responsiveness	Demandingness	autonomy
Age		.04	.02	.08	-.11	.20*	.23*

Gender	.04		-.05	.53**	-.20*	.14	-.15
Self-Esteem	.02	-.05		.15	.04	.02	-.07
GPA	.08	.53**	.15		-.03	.29**	-.02
Responsive- ness	-.11	-.20*	.04	-.03		.03	.39**
Demanding- ness	.20*	.14	.02	.29**	.03		-.07
Autonomy	.23*	-.15	-.07	-.02	.39	-.07	

Notes:

* indicates that the relationship is significant at the $p < .05$ level (2-tailed)

** indicates that the relationship is significant at the $p < .01$ level (2-tailed)

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Current Issues in Education



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Volume 13, Number 1

ISSN 1099-839X

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