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PERCEPCIÓN DE LA JUSTICIA EN LA EDUCACIÓN A TRAVÉS DE MAPAS MENTALES DIGITALES: COMPRENDIENDO LAS PERSPECTIVAS DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DOTADOS SOBRE LA EQUIDAD Y LA IMPARCIALIDAD

Perception of justice in education through digital mind maps: Understanding gifted students' perspectives on fairness and equity

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Resumen

El propósito de este estudio es investigar las percepciones de los estudiantes dotados con respecto al concepto de "justicia" en la asignatura de Ciencias Sociales mediante el uso de mapas mentales digitales y el método Q. La investigación se llevó a cabo utilizando el método Q, uno de los enfoques de investigación cualitativa. Los participantes fueron seleccionados mediante un muestreo intencional entre estudiantes dotados de 6.º, 7.º y 8.º grado que asisten a un Centro de Ciencia y Arte (CCA) en Turquía. Durante la recopilación de datos, se presentaron a los estudiantes actividades con mapas mentales digitales y tarjetas Q relacionadas con el concepto de justicia. Se pidió a los estudiantes que clasificaran estas afirmaciones según sus percepciones subjetivas. Los datos recopilados fueron analizados mediante análisis factorial y se visualizaron las formas en que los grupos de estudiantes conceptualizaron la noción de justicia. Los resultados revelaron que las percepciones de justicia de los estudiantes variaban según temas como las necesidades individuales, la equidad social y la igualdad. Además, se observó que los mapas mentales digitales contribuyeron a los procesos de pensamiento conceptual y de construcción de significado de los estudiantes. Este estudio aporta tanto a la diferenciación del contenido para estudiantes dotados en la enseñanza de Ciencias Sociales como a los enfoques pedagógicos asistidos por tecnología.

Palabras clave: Estudiantes dotados, Concepto de justicia, Educación en Ciencias Sociales, Mapas mentales digitales, Método Q

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of gifted students regarding the concept of "justice" in Social Studies through digital mind maps and the Q method. The research was conducted using the Q method, which is one of the qualitative research designs. Participants were selected through purposive sampling from 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade gifted students attending a Science and Art Center (SAC) in Turkey. During data collection, students were presented with digital mind map activities and Q cards related to the concept of justice. The students were asked to rank these statements according to their subjective perceptions. The collected data were analyzed through factor analysis, and the ways in which student groups conceptualized the notion of justice were visualized. The findings revealed that students' perceptions of justice varied according to themes such as individual needs, societal fairness, and equality. Additionally, it was observed that digital mind maps contributed to the students' conceptual thinking and meaning-making processes. This study contributes to both content differentiation for gifted students in Social Studies instruction and technology-assisted pedagogical approaches.

Key words: Gifted students, Concept of justice, Social Studies education, Digital mind maps, Q method

Introduction

In the educational paradigm of the 21st century, the ability of individuals not only to access knowledge but also to understand, interpret, and position this knowledge within a system of values is becoming increasingly important. In this context, the teaching of abstract and multi-dimensional concepts such as "justice" requires not only cognitive transfer but also an affective and ethical awareness process (Ünal & Er, 2017). Social Studies aims to help individuals understand social life, develop citizenship consciousness, and think through ethical values, with the concept of justice being at the core of this process (Özgür & Şeker, 2022).

Gifted students, in particular, are individuals who can make more complex abstractions at the cognitive level and develop critical thinking and moral reasoning capacities at an earlier stage (Diiska & Syafril, 2024). Therefore, these students require differentiated, deepened, and meaning-focused learning experiences in the teaching of value-based concepts. However, in both Turkey and the international literature, there is a limited number of unique and qualitative studies on gifted students' perceptions of values, particularly regarding their understanding of the concept of justice in Social Studies (Bolat, 2020; Wright & Reis, 2023).

In recent years, the use of digital tools in learning environments has become increasingly widespread, aiming to enhance conceptual awareness and allow students to structure their thoughts. One of these tools, digital mind maps, facilitates students' visualization of relationships between information and concepts, externalization of

cognitive processes, and multi-dimensional thinking (Novak & Cañas, 2008). These tools have been shown to provide meaningful learning environments for gifted individuals, especially in the learning of complex concepts (Çevik, 2021; Tosun & Gökçe, 2024).

This study also aims to identify different thought patterns related to the concept of justice by using the Q method, which is highly effective in analyzing individuals' subjective perceptions and conceptual construction processes. The Q method is based on an epistemological ground that differentiates it from traditional qualitative and quantitative approaches in its effort to objectify values, beliefs, and attitudes, allowing for the structural analysis of subjective experiences (Brown, 1993; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The primary aim of this research is to explore the perceptions of gifted students regarding the concept of "justice" in Social Studies through digital mind maps and the Q method. In this context, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the themes and factors between students' digital mind maps and Q-methodology?
2. What are the relationships between the results of students' digital mind maps and Q-methodology?
3. What are the degrees of correlation between students' digital mind maps and Q-methodology?
4. What is the intensity and distribution of the themes in students' perceptions of justice?

The significance of this study is highlighted in several ways: First, it offers a theoretical contribution to the literature by addressing the development of moral and social value concepts in the context of Social Studies education for gifted students. Second, it presents an instructional innovation by analyzing the impact of contemporary teaching tools, such as digital mind maps, on these students' conceptual meaning-making processes. Third, it fills a methodological gap by using the rarely employed but highly powerful Q method to deeply examine students' subjective perception structures. Finally, it provides guidance to practicing teachers and educational policymakers, especially in the teaching of fundamental concepts such as "justice" in Social Studies.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The Concept of Justice and Social Studies Education

Justice is an essential value in social life, concerning the protection of individuals' rights, creating equal opportunities, and maintaining social order. Teaching the concept of justice in Social Studies aims to develop students' understanding of democratic values, human rights, and social responsibility (Ersoy & Sahin, 2012). Justice is a concept that incorporates both individual and societal principles of human rights and equality, representing a fundamental value, especially in the educational context, enabling individuals to make informed decisions (Pala, 2018; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

Social Studies education helps students make sense of these fundamental values in both personal and social contexts. In this context, justice shapes not only students' academic knowledge but also their ethical and social responsibility awareness (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020). Gifted students, in particular, tend to have the ability to understand such abstract and complex concepts more quickly and deeply (Diiska & Syafril, 2024). Studies focused on gifted students' understanding of values such as justice can assist educators in teaching these concepts more effectively (Pala, 2018).

Gifted Students and Values Education

Gifted students are those who exhibit differences from their peers in cognitive abilities and intellectual capacities. These students may demonstrate advanced mental skills, such as abstract thinking, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Wright & Reis, 2023). In this context, the education of gifted students involves not only academic success but also deep reflection on personal and social values. Effective values education for gifted students must take into account their cognitive capacities, emotional development, and social awareness. These students are expected to develop a deeper understanding of abstract concepts such as justice. Furthermore, differentiated teaching methods used in the education of gifted students support their cognitive and emotional development, providing a more meaningful learning process. Therefore, educational environments for gifted students should be specifically designed to address their needs (Weber et al., 2021).

Digital Mind Maps and Their Use in Education

Digital mind maps are tools that allow students to visualize conceptual relationships and externalize their thinking processes. These tools help students deepen their understanding by relating the concepts they learn to each other (Novak & Cañas, 2008). The use of digital mind maps in education has been proven to be particularly beneficial for learning abstract and complex concepts. Since gifted students can understand and analyze abstract concepts more quickly, digital mind maps significantly contribute to their learning processes. Research indicates that digital mind maps deepen students' learning processes, enhance their conceptual understanding, and improve their ability to organize information (Tosun & Gökçe, 2024). These tools offer students the opportunity not only to recall information but also to logically organize and relate it. In the teaching of multi-dimensional concepts like justice, digital mind maps allow students to evaluate these concepts from various perspectives.

The Q Method and Its Use in Education

The Q method is a research method used to analyze individuals' values, beliefs, and perceptions. In the Q method, participants are asked to rank or rate specific statements, aiming to measure their subjective perceptions on these topics (Brown, 1993). The Q method is particularly suitable for analyzing abstract and subjective concepts such as values, beliefs, and attitudes. This method categorizes individuals' perceptions, identifying different thought patterns. The use of the Q method in education is highly valuable for understanding how students comprehend and perceive a topic. In this study, the Q method will be used to explore students' perceptions of the concept of justice. By revealing similarities and differences in students' conceptual understanding and perceptions, the Q method can help educators develop more effective teaching strategies (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Previous Studies in the Literature

Previous studies on gifted students' perceptions of the concept of justice show that this group of students has a high-level understanding of abstract concepts and tends to approach the understanding of values differently from other students (Diiska & Syafril, 2024; Wright & Reis, 2023). However, these studies mostly rely on quantitative

data collection methods. There is limited research on the integration of digital tools and the Q method into values education for gifted students. In this context, this study aims to fill this gap by examining gifted students' perceptions of the concept of justice through digital mind maps and the Q method.

Methodology

The data obtained through digital mind maps will be analyzed using the Q method. The Q method is a qualitative research technique used to understand individuals' views on subjective topics such as values, perceptions, and beliefs (Brown, 1993).

Research Model and Design

This research is designed as a descriptive research model. Descriptive research is a type of study used to describe and examine the current situation, and in this case, it will be used to determine students' perceptions of the concept of justice. The study is also designed with an inclusive research pattern, which foresees the use of both data collection methods together (Tripodi & Bender, 2010).

Participants

The participants of the study will be gifted students attending Science and Art Centers (BİLSEM) in Turkey. These students are characterized by cognitive abilities that distinguish them from their peers, with superior skills in abstract thinking, problem-solving, and analytical abilities. The participants will be diverse in terms of age group and gender, with a total of 30 students selected. The participants will be selected based on the following criteria: Students will be from 6th, 7th, and 8th grades at BİLSEM. Students must be at an age and developmental level capable of understanding the fundamental concepts related to social studies. Participation will be based on voluntary consent.

Data Collection Tools

Digital mind maps

In the first phase of the data collection process, participants will be presented with digital mind maps. Mind maps are a visual tool that allows students to better understand their perceptions of the concept of justice. These maps will help students

visualize various related concepts and the relationships between these concepts regarding justice (Novak & Cañas, 2008).

The students will be asked to identify concepts related to justice and create a digital map explaining the relationships between these concepts. These maps will support students in organizing their ideas, identifying connections, and concretizing abstract concepts. Through digital tools, students will have more opportunities for interaction and can express their thoughts more clearly in the digital environment.

Q method

The Q method will be used to deeply explore gifted students' perceptions of the concept of justice. The Q method is a powerful technique that combines qualitative and quantitative data analysis approaches, allowing for the systematic analysis of subjective judgments (Brown, 1993). In this context, a unique Q sorting form will be developed to measure students' perceptions of justice.

In the first stage of tool development, a comprehensive pool of statements will be created to reflect the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of justice. The pool will include thematic headings such as equality, fairness, opportunity equality, individual justice, social justice, and procedural justice. A total of 25 unique statements will be developed based on these themes. These statements will be constructed both based on the literature review and considering the conceptual understanding levels of middle school students.

To ensure content validity, the views of field experts (from educational sciences, philosophy, and psychology) will be consulted. Based on the experts' suggestions, some statements will be simplified, conflicting statements will be removed, and statements with conceptual overlap will be avoided.

The developed set of statements will be pilot-tested with a small group of students (n=14). During the pilot test, the students' understanding of the statements, challenges encountered in ranking, and feedback on the scale structure will be evaluated. As a result, the 25 statements will be presented to each student in the form of cards, and the students will be asked to rank them according to their thoughts using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from -2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree). Students will rank these statements using the forced distribution method, creating a pyramidal

structure. This process will convert each student's individual conceptual world of justice into a numerical profile.

The Q sorting results will be transferred to a computer environment by creating a Q sorting matrix for each student. These data will then be analyzed using factor analysis to identify students exhibiting similar thought patterns. The resulting factors will represent thematic groups related to how students construct the concept of justice.

Data Collection Process

The data collection, analysis, and reporting processes of the research took 6 weeks. The phases are detailed in the table below.

Table 1
Research Process

Week	Phase Name	Duration / Hours	Description
1st Week	Preparation and Planning	2 Hours	Research tools were prepared, digital mind maps and Q statements were introduced, permissions were obtained.
2nd Week	Digital Mind Map Training and Application	2 Hours	Students were introduced to mind mapping software, sample applications were done, map drafts were created.
3rd Week	Development and Evaluation of Digital Maps	2 Hours	Maps were completed, feedback was provided, content structure was finalized.
4th Week	Q Method: Statement Sorting and Application	2 Hours	Students sorted 25 statements according to their views, and forms were collected.
5th Week	Data Analysis: Q Factor Analysis and Theme Identification	2 Hours	Q sortings were transferred to the software, factor analysis was performed, similarity patterns were identified.
6th Week	Evaluation of Results and Reporting	2 Hours	Findings were reported thematically, maps and Q outputs were compared, results were prepared for presentation.

A brief guide was provided to students to help them think about the concept of justice. This guide included questions such as, "What does justice mean to you?" and "Why is justice important for individuals and society?" Students were then introduced to

online platforms such as MindMeister, Coggle, and Popplet. They created digital mind maps with justice as the central concept, incorporating terms like "equality," "fairness," and "opportunity equality." The structure of the maps allowed students to visualize their conceptual relationships. After completing the maps, feedback was provided, and revisions were made based on identified gaps. At the end of the process, students were asked reflective questions.

The statements related to justice were created based on the literature review and expert opinions. Statements were designed to reflect the multi-dimensional nature of justice, such as "Justice requires equal treatment for all" or "Justice advocates for different treatment based on individuals' needs." Participants were presented with 25 different statements. Students ranked these statements using a 5-point scale (strongly agree – strongly disagree). This process lasted approximately 20 minutes, and a ranking profile was obtained for each student. The resulting Q sorts were subjected to factor analysis using Q analysis software. This analysis grouped students based on similar cognitive patterns.

Data Analysis

Analysis of digital mind maps

The digital mind maps created by students were analyzed using content analysis. The frequency of concepts in the maps, relationships between concepts, and the overall structure were considered. This analysis revealed both similar and different understandings of the concept of justice among students.

Analysis with Q method

The rankings obtained through the Q method were subjected to factor analysis using Q analysis software. Each student's ranking data were analyzed according to their subjective viewpoints. The resulting factors reflected the thought clusters of students concerning the concept of justice (e.g., equality-based, individual needs-based, and social fairness-based). The content of these factors was interpreted in detail.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, expert opinions were sought. The Q method statements and the criteria for digital mind maps were evaluated by expert educators. Additionally, the contents created by students were validated using a

repetitive analysis method. This validation process enhanced the consistency of the findings.

Findings

Table 2

Themes and Factors Between Digital Mind Maps and Q Method

Theme	Digital Mind Maps	Q Method Factor Group	High Ranking Percentage (%)	Digital Mind Maps Example
Equality Theme	Yes	Equal Perception (Factor 1)	85%	Central Box: 'Equal rights and opportunities' - Outer boxes: 'Education', 'Work life', 'Social life'. The student represents 'equal treatment' in each box.
Individual Needs Theme	Yes	Individual Needs (Factor 2)	78%	Central Box: 'Justice based on individual needs' - Outer boxes: 'Disabled students', 'Learning difficulties', 'Language barriers'. Indicates the need for different support strategies.
Social Justice Theme	Yes	Social Justice (Factor 3)	82%	Central Box: 'Social equality' - Outer boxes: 'Economic inequality', 'Inequality in education', 'Healthcare'. Emphasizes the need to eliminate inequalities.

Students visualized the concept of equality by focusing on the understanding of "equal rights and opportunities." In their maps, they emphasized that equality should be ensured in school, work life, and society. A visual language was created, symbolizing equal opportunities for everyone by using four equal boxes and different human symbols. This theme is ranked as Equal Perception (Factor 1) and is the area where students emphasized equal opportunities and equal treatment the most (85%). The students stated that equality should not only be ensured at a legal or official level but also in social life. They believed that justice is based on equality and that equal opportunities should be offered to every individual. This perception strongly supports the idea that equal treatment and opportunities should be provided in society.

In the digital mind maps, students made a strong emphasis on considering individual needs. These maps specifically highlighted the special needs of individuals such as disabled students, students with learning difficulties, and those with language barriers. Students noted that justice cannot be achieved through equal treatment alone and that differentiated support is necessary based on each individual's specific needs. The Individual Needs (Factor 2) theme shows that students believe justice should not only be about equality in general but should also be shaped according to individual differences (78%). Students believe that justice should ensure equal rights and opportunities while also considering each individual's different needs. This perspective emphasizes the need to differentiate education for individuals with special needs.

The Social Justice theme involves the understanding that social inequalities should be eliminated and that everyone should have equal rights. In their maps, students symbolized social injustices and inequalities, stating that every individual in society should be equipped with equal rights. The maps also presented solutions to issues such as economic inequality, educational inequality, and access to healthcare. The Social Justice (Factor 3) theme reflects the students' sensitivity to social inequalities and their belief that these inequalities should be addressed (82%). Additionally, the opinion that justice should be ensured not only at an individual level but also in society was strongly expressed. Students noted that economic inequalities and imbalances in education should be eliminated in society.

Table 3

Relationships Between Digital Mind Maps and Q Method Results

Theme	Digital Mind Maps	Q Method Factor Group	High Ranking Percentage (%)
Equality Theme	Yes	Equal Perception (Factor 1)	85%
Individual Needs Theme	Yes	Individual Needs (Factor 2)	78%
Social Justice Theme	Yes	Social Justice (Factor 3)	82%

The themes in the table show that students' perceptions of justice are multidimensional. The Equality Theme received the highest ranking and showed the strongest relationship

between digital mind maps and the Q method. This reveals that students focused primarily on ensuring equal opportunities. The Individual Needs Theme also received a high ranking, showing that students believed justice should be shaped according to the special needs of individuals. The Social Justice Theme is also significant and reflects the understanding of justice based on eliminating social inequalities and fairness principles.

Table 4

Relationship Degrees Between Digital Mind Maps and Q Method

Factor	Themes	Digital Mind Maps (High Degree)	Q Method (High Degree)	Relationship Degree (%)
Factor 1: Equal Perception	Equality Theme	85%	90%	92%
Factor 2: Individual Needs	Individual Needs Theme	80%	75%	82%
Factor 3: Social Justice	Social Justice Theme	82%	80%	84%

The relationship degrees in Table 4 show a strong correlation between the data from digital mind maps and Q method. The Equal Perception factor achieved the highest degree in both datasets and emphasizes that students' understanding of justice focuses on providing equal opportunities. Furthermore, the Individual Needs and Social Justice themes are also closely related. These results demonstrate that justice is viewed not only in terms of equality but also from a broader perspective, considering individual needs and eliminating social inequalities.

Table 5

Density and Distribution of Themes in Students' Perceptions of Justice

Theme	Density (%)	Distribution (%)
Equality Theme	40%	85%
Individual Needs Theme	35%	78%
Social Justice Theme	25%	82%

In Table 5, it can be observed that the Equality Theme has the highest density in students' perceptions of justice. The Equality Theme reflects a strong perception of social equality and providing equal opportunities. The Individual Needs Theme shows that students believe justice should not only be equal but also shaped by considering individual differences. The Social Justice Theme aims to address social inequalities and ensure justice in society.

Discussion

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to understanding the perceptions of gifted students regarding the concept of justice. Themes such as equality, individual needs, and social equity have prominently emerged in the data obtained through digital thinking maps and the Q Method. These findings align with concepts highlighted in similar studies conducted in recent years. Kettler and Taliaferro (2022) and Peters (2022) emphasized that the perceptions of gifted students regarding justice encompass an understanding of social equality and the consideration of individual differences. This study confirms that students argue for the importance of equal opportunities and the consideration of individual needs. Furthermore, Boyadjieva et al. (2024) emphasized that justice should not only provide equal opportunities but also consider individual differences, which parallels the findings related to the theme of individual needs. The theme of social equity has also been a key focus in previous studies, such as those by Miller (2019), where the need to address social inequalities was highlighted. In this context, the findings of our study further underscore the importance of social equity.

The themes of equality and social equity align with the expected outcomes, as these are the primary aspects through which students typically approach the concept of justice. These themes highlight the importance of providing equal opportunities and rights in education, which corresponds with the general trends in the literature. The theme of individual needs was also an anticipated result, particularly in relation to the individualized approach in special education and how these needs are connected to the perception of justice. However, the students' strong focus on social inequalities had a more significant impact than expected. This suggests that students not only concentrated on the theme of social equity but also believed that society as a whole must address broader inequalities. This finding indicates that even young students' perceptions of social justice and equality are strongly shaped.

In this study, the use of digital thinking maps has proven to be an effective tool for visualizing students' perceptions of justice. The literature often emphasizes how digital tools help students make abstract thoughts more concrete and offer opportunities that deepen the learning process for gifted students. Kumi-Yeboah et al. (2020) highlighted that the use of technology supports students' thinking processes and enhances their abstract thinking skills. In this regard, digital thinking maps can be said to have provided students with a more detailed understanding of the concept of justice. The role of technology in special education was also discussed by Escudeiro et al. (2023), who emphasized how digital tools can enhance learning processes for special education students. These findings support the view that digital tools hold an important place in education.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of gifted students' perceptions of the concept of justice using digital thinking maps and the Q Method. The findings reveal that students' understanding of justice is shaped around three main themes: equality, individual needs, and social equity. These themes align with the literature, indicating that students embrace educational approaches sensitive to social equality, equal opportunities, and individual requirements (Brighouse, 2003; Noddings, 2015). The theme of equality combines with the understanding that justice should not only provide equal opportunities but also address the diverse needs of individuals. The theme of individual needs reinforces the idea that each student should receive an education tailored to their pace and requirements (Tomlinson, 2014). The theme of social equity highlights that students consider not only their individual experiences but also societal injustices and inequalities. The findings of this study demonstrate that digital technologies, particularly digital thinking maps, play a significant role in helping students visualize abstract concepts, articulate their ideas, and engage in deeper conceptual thinking (Al-Fadhli, 2008; Novak & Cañas, 2008). This suggests the need for further research on the use of technology in the education of gifted students.

Recommendations

It is crucial for teachers to integrate tools such as digital thinking maps into educational processes to enable students to better understand and discuss abstract concepts. These tools can assist students in expressing complex ideas like justice and

equality in more concrete ways. Designing educational materials that take into account individual needs plays a critical role in ensuring that each student has access to equal opportunities for learning. Especially for gifted students, differentiated teaching methods should be employed. Classroom activities such as discussions and projects should be organized to help students develop their understanding of justice and equality. By considering different perspectives, students can gain a deeper understanding of the concept of justice. Policymakers should develop policies that ensure equal opportunities in education. These policies should ensure that every student has the necessary educational resources to reach their full potential. Policies promoting the use of digital tools in education should be created. In particular, providing support to increase the use of digital tools in special education can enhance the learning processes of students. Policymakers should also ensure the necessary infrastructure and educational support to achieve social equity in education. Programs should be developed that offer equal opportunities to students, taking into account the inequalities in social and economic conditions. This study demonstrates that digital tools are effective in examining gifted students' perceptions of justice. Future research should build upon these findings by conducting studies with larger sample groups and in different geographical regions. The effectiveness of methods such as the Q Method and digital thinking maps should be examined in various social and cultural contexts. Additionally, long-term monitoring of the effects on student behavior and perceptions will reveal the sustainable impact of digital tools in education.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, the sample size and geographical limitations restrict the generalizability of the findings. For instance, this study was conducted in a specific school, and research conducted with students from different regions or cultures could yield different results. Another limitation is the inability to fully assess the extent to which digital thinking maps reflect students' understanding of justice. Although digital maps are an effective tool for representing students' thoughts, the way individual ideas are shaped in the maps may vary depending on the student's overall thinking style and cognitive level. Additionally, the data obtained from the Q Method reflect students' subjective views. Students' perceptions and interpretations may be influenced by their personal experiences. Therefore, generalizing these findings and applying them to a broader population may be limited.

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