

RETHINKING SCHOOL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING IN KENYA: ADDRESSING STUDENT NEEDS EFFECTIVELY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study investigated the barriers to effective guidance and counseling in Meru Central District secondary schools. Descriptive survey design was used and through stratified and purposive sampling, 220 participants comprising 200 form three students and 20 teacher-counselors were selected from 20 schools. Data was collected using a questionnaire and an interview schedule and analysis was done using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The major finding was that the following are the main barriers to effective G&C in secondary schools: lack of training among majority of teacher-counselors (60%), identity and role ambiguity of teacher counselors, students' wrong perceptions of G&C, fear of teachers, inadequate time for G&C and lack of confidentiality as evidenced by lack of private rooms for counseling in 80% of the schools. The researchers recommend a comprehensive G&C program with trained full time school counselors, G&C awareness for students and private rooms for counseling in all secondary schools.

Key Words: Guidance and Counseling, barriers, effectiveness, role, teacher-counselor

1. Background to the Study

The basic aim of school guidance and counseling (G&C) is to address the holistic developmental needs of students. It helps students to manage their behavior, keep up academically, become aware of their strengths, weaknesses, interests and capabilities, plan for their future and fulfill their potential (UNESCO, 1999). Countries like the US, Finland and Canada already have comprehensive school counseling programs which are implemented by well trained full-time school counselors (Harris, 2013). In Kenya, formal school G&C program was recognized in the 1970s when a unit

was created in the Ministry of Education to deal with educational and vocational guidance, and psychological counseling in schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST), 2005). Many studies and media reports however show that Kenyan institutions of learning especially secondary schools have continued to experience a rise in problems that are expected to be prevented or solved through guidance and counseling.

For example, in 1991, the male students invaded girls' dormitories, killed 19 and raped 70 of the girls at St Kizito Secondary School in Meru. In 1998, four prefects were burnt to death in their cubicles by fellow students at Nyeri High School, in 2000/2001 and 2008 there were 250 and 300 strikes in secondary schools respectively some of which led to much destruction of property (Karanja & Bowen, 2012). Following these student unrests, there were intensified calls for strengthening of school counseling program from various education stakeholders including authors and organizations such as the Human Rights Watch. A study by Ngumbi (2004) revealed that the ability of the then G&C program to boost teaching and learning process and improve student discipline was wanting due to lack of support and counseling skills among teachers. The study recommended adequate training of G & C teachers. The report of the *Task Force on Student Discipline and Unrest in Secondary Schools*, 2001 also recommended strengthening of counseling in all schools (Republic of Kenya, 2001).

Several measures such as in-servicing of teachers and introduction of a new subject known as 'Social Skills' have been taken so far. But despite these efforts, students' behavioral, psychological and social problems have continued to increase, with over 120 dormitories being set ablaze by students in various secondary schools between 2015 and 2016 (Kazungu, 2015; Omondi, 2016). The question that arises and begs for an answer is: Does the current G&C program address student needs adequately by? Review of literature did not satisfactorily explain the prevailing barriers to effectiveness of guidance and counseling in secondary schools and it is this gap in knowledge that spurred the undertaking of this study.

2. Statement of the Problem

There is a disturbing rise in socially unacceptable behaviors among secondary school students in Kenya; for instance the burning of more than 120 dormitories between 2015 and 2016. Students' behavioral, psychological and social problems are expected to be prevented or solved through the School Guidance and Counseling Program required to be implemented in every school by the Government. But the current state of affairs is an indication that student needs are not being adequately addressed and the hindrances are also not clearly understood. If the status quo prevails, more loss will be incurred and the quality of education will be greatly compromised. Therefore, this study sought to explore barriers to effective guidance and counseling in Secondary Schools in Meru Central District, Kenya

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore barriers to effective guidance and counseling in secondary schools in Meru Central district, Kenya

4. Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- a) What are the factors hindering students from making use of the guidance and counseling services in public secondary schools?

- b) How competent are the guidance and counseling teachers in public secondary schools?
- c) What challenges do guidance and counseling teachers face in public secondary schools?

5. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Client-Centred Theory of Counseling which was put forward by Carl Rogers in the 1950s. Rogers postulated that for constructive change to occur in the client, the following six conditions must exist and continue over a period of time: **A Relationship** –existence of a psychological contact between the client who is incongruent and the therapist who must be congruent, **Empathy** – which means the counselor must make every effort to understand the client's view point and experience, **Congruence** – the counselor must be completely genuine, **Unconditional positive regard** - the counselor must value the client and avoid being judgmental, and **Communication** - to the client about the counselor's empathy and unconditional positive regard (America Psychological Association (APA), 1992).

Client centred theory further recognizes the need to offer counseling services in a neutral and comfortable setting where the client can feel at ease to discuss their experiences. The approach is one of the most used theories of counseling both by practitioners and researchers. It has been found useful in helping individuals to overcome anxiety, personality disorders and drug addictions among other issues (The British Association for the Person Centred Approach, (BAPCA), 2015).

This theory was chosen because there is a relationship between the Carl Rogers' conditions for constructive change to occur in the client and the variables of the study such as the teacher-counselor's competency (independent variable) as a condition for effective student guidance and counseling (dependent variable). For example, students are likely to avoid seeking for counseling from a teacher-counselor who does not show them empathy and unconditional positive regard. The Carl Rogers' conditions for constructive change in the client provided an appropriate framework for exploring the barriers to effective student guidance and counseling in secondary schools.

6. Literature Review

6.1 The Concept School Guidance and Counseling

Guidance is the assistance given to individuals so that they would understand themselves and their world and make intelligent decisions and adjustments in life in their day to day activities (Fields and Boesser, 2002). The term **counseling** on the other hand can be defined in different ways depending on the theoretical orientation. According to UNESCO (1999) Counseling is a relationship between a concerned person and a person or persons with a need, designed to help them to understand and clarify their views, and learn how to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful, well-informed choices, and through the resolution of emotional or interpersonal problems. A school guidance and counseling program is therefore meant to address the holistic developmental needs of all students; helping them to become aware of their strengths, weaknesses, interests and capabilities so that they can be the best persons they could be. The program also attends to the needs of parents, guardians, all school stakeholders and the community.

School Guidance and Counseling emerged in the United States of America near the end of the late 1890s. This was a socially turbulent period characterized by difficult life in the urban slums and changes in the way individuals viewed themselves and others as one century was ending and another one beginning (Stickel & Yang, 1993). By the 1920s education courses for counselors had already begun at Harvard University and the profession was also developing in countries like France and Britain. In the Mid 20th century, school counseling was greatly influenced by the works and theories of several scholars such as Gilbert Wrenn's 1962 book; *The Counselor in a Changing*

World, Carl Rodgers Client Centred Theory and John Krumboltz's behavioral counseling approach among others. So far countries like the US, Finland and Canada have comprehensive school counseling programs which are implemented by qualified full-time counselors. But in most of the developing countries including Kenya, school counseling is currently facing many challenges related to attitudes, counselor skills, facilities and support among other challenges (Momanyi 2013).

6.2 Role of the School Counselor and Students' Use of G&C Services

Students world over are faced with numerous challenges due to the socio-emotional, cognitive and biological changes that take place at the youth stage. These challenges include bullying, suicide, drug and substance abuse, academic underachievement, loss, family breakdown, peer relationship difficulties, HIV/AIDS pandemic and school violence among others. Without a clear support system many students are usually unable to overcome these challenges and some of them end up with miserable lives. The role of the school counselor therefore is to work with students and parents to help the students address the above referred needs and become the best they can become (Wambu & Fisher, 2015; Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), 2014).

In the countries where school G&C programs are well established, teachers and students have positive attitudes towards the programs and students make use of the G&C services voluntarily whether they have problems or not. According to the US National Centre for Educational Statistics, the guidance and counseling program activity in which students voluntarily participate most is individual counseling sessions (Carey & Martin, 2015). Also a study conducted in Singapore by Low (2014) revealed that teachers in this country view counseling services as a helpful addition because of the extended individual attention to students. It helps teachers to learn more about students from a different perspective. But almost the opposite happens in Kenya.

A study conducted in Meru Central District by Gitonga (1999) revealed that generally students were unwilling to admit that they had problems and they refused to open up because they had negative attitude towards guidance and counseling services. Students were afraid of being seen with the teacher counselor or in the counseling room. Wambu and Fisher (2015) see the teacher-counselor's role as one of the causes of this situation. They argue that Kenyan teacher counselors find it difficult to play the dual roles of the teacher and the counselor at the same time. The dual roles in most cases hinder the counselor's effectiveness since students will find it difficult to see an emphatic counselor in the same strict teacher in their classroom duties. One of the objectives of this study was to identify the current factors hindering students from making use of G&C services in Meru Central District.

6.3 Competencies and Skills for Effective School Guidance and Counseling

According to the America School Counselor Association (ASCA) school counselors must have some specific knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes to ensure they are equipped to meet the rigorous demands of the students and the profession. The professional school counselor should articulate and demonstrate ability and understanding of: the organizational structure and components of effective school counseling, counseling and leadership principles and theories, adherence to counseling ethics and state laws, effective communication, good record keeping among other qualifications. All school counselors must not only be trained but also certified to ensure that they are law abiding and morally upright (ASCA, 2015).

For example, in regard to ethics, confidentiality is an essential counseling principal which was also noted earlier in the theoretical framework of this study. You cannot help a client effectively unless

she/he knows that you will not betray their secrets. The teacher counselor should ensure that the colleagues and other staff who she works with are also aware of the need to maintain clients' (students') confidentiality. Records of the clients are to be safeguarded whether written or stored in the computer. The other skills a counselor requires include empathy, attention, honesty, moving at the clients' pace, accepting client's problems and allowing clients' feelings (KEMI, 2014). Without proper training of school guidance and counselors, student needs cannot be addressed effectively because according to Mbiti (2007), guidance and counseling is a professional advice and therefore to be effective it must be offered by a professional in that area.

A number of countries have so far given considerable attention to competencies and skills of school counselors. For example, by 2002 and 2008, the United States and Singapore respectively had provided each public school with at least one full-time counseling practitioner. The US employment over 49000 certified and licensed school counselors giving a ratio of 284 students for every school counselor (Carey & Martin, 2015). But many developing countries such as Kenya training is not yet mandatory because it is teachers who are appointed to take charge over the guidance and counseling programs (Wambu & Fisher, 2015). Indeed studies by Ngumbi (2004), Simatwa and Ajowi (2010) and Momanyi (2013) among other scholars show that guidance and counseling teachers in Kenyan schools are inadequately trained for the roles they are required to play. This study sought to explore further the teacher counselor's competencies as a barrier to effective student guidance and counseling.

6.4 Challenges faced by Guidance and Counseling teachers in Kenya

A study by Simatwa and Ajowi (2010) revealed that the following challenges faced by Guidance and Counseling teachers in Kenya: Lack of policy framework for implementation, Lack of trained teacher counselors to head the counseling departments, Lack of resource materials to be used during counseling sessions, too much workload for teachers hence no time for counseling, and students not taking guidance and counseling correction seriously. Wambu and Fisher (2015) also argue that the absence of a unified ethical code for school counselors in Kenya poses a challenge because the current ethical standards pertain to the entire counseling profession which were developed 2012 by the Kenya Counseling and Psychological Association (KCPA). School counselors need a school-tailored code of ethics but are now expected to adhere to these general ethical standards.

6.5 Knowledge gaps

Reports of drug abuse, socially unacceptable sexual activities and destructive school strikes have become common and are on the rise among secondary school students in Kenya. Case in point is the burning of more than 120 dormitories between 2015 and 2016 (Kazungu, 2015; Omondi, 2016). There seems to be lack of effective strategy to contain student indiscipline despite the government's continued emphasis on the use of guidance and counseling. The Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) for instance has been inservicing all school principals and one of the courses they take is Guidance and Counseling. The irrational behavior of students is an indication that their needs are not being adequately addressed under the current guidance and counseling program and if the status quo is maintained, the quality of education and the security of school members and property will continue to be compromised. Although previous studies have identified the challenges faced by the G&C teachers as indicated above, current barriers to effective student guidance and counseling required to be further explored for clearer understanding and interventions for improvement proposed. This was the purpose of this study in Meru Central District where a

study by Gitonga (1999) revealed that guidance and counseling was ineffective in secondary schools at that time.

7. Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey design because according to (Orodho, 2012) it helps to describe existing phenomena without manipulation and employs the collected data to justify the situation. The design therefore enabled the researcher to gather views and opinion of the guidance and counseling teachers and students regarding barriers to effective guidance and counseling in secondary schools. Stratified sampling was used to select 20 schools (40%) for the study from a total of 50 public secondary schools in the District. A total of 703 Form 3 students from the sampled schools were purposively targeted for this study because it was assumed that they were better acquainted with school guidance and counseling program than Form 1 and 2 students. The Form 4 students were excluded from the study because they were busy preparing for their final examination. Stratified random sampling was used to select 200 students (28.4%) to participate in the study while purpose sampling was used to involve 20 guidance and counseling teachers from the 20 schools yielding a sample size of 220 participants (30.4%).

An in-depth interview schedule was used to gather information from the guidance and counseling teachers while a questionnaire was used to collect data from the students. A research permit was obtained from the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) through the University. Further permission to collect data was sought from Meru Central District Commissioner, District Education Officer and the Principals of the sampled schools. The researcher made visits to the sampled schools prior to the day of data collection to make arrangements on how the research instruments were to be administered. Data was successfully collected in four weeks and then analyzed using descriptive statistics. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21.0) was used to ease the process of quantitative data analysis and the generated data was presented in frequency distribution tables, percentages, charts and bar graphs. The qualitative data yielded from the interview schedule and the open ended questionnaire items was organized, summarized and inferences drawn from it according to themes emanating from the research objectives. Finally logical conclusions and recommendations were made.

8. Results and Discussions

8.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 below gives a summary of the gender characteristics of the respondents

Table 1

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students		
Females	109	54.5
Males	91	45.5
Total	200	100
Teacher Counselors		
Females	12	60
Males	8	40
Total	20	100

Table 1 indicates that there were more male students in Form three than their female counterparts and more female teacher counselors than their male counterparts. To prevent gender biased results, stratified random sampling was used to ensure both gender were adequately represented in the study. The small gender variation in teacher-counselors would have negligible effect on the study findings.

Major Findings

8.2 Hindrances to Students' Use of Guidance and Counseling Services

The first objective was to identify factors hindering students from making use of guidance and counseling services in public secondary schools. To achieve the objective, student respondents were asked to indicate how often they sought guidance and counseling services while teacher counselors were asked to indicate how often students sought guidance and counseling services from them. Table 2 below summarizes the information gathered from the two categories of respondents.

Table 2: Students' Use of Guidance and Counseling Services

Students' Use of Guidance and Counseling Services	Students		Teacher-Counselors	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	16	0.08	3	15
Very Often	45	22.5	7	35
Often	80	40.0	10	50
Rarely	59	29.5	0	0
Never				
Total	200	100	20	100

The data on table 2 above shows students make minimal use of guidance and counseling services in public secondary schools. Minority of the students (about 23%) frequently make use of guidance and counseling services while the majority of them seek the services either rarely or never. Half of the teacher-counselors (50%) concurred that students rarely seek guidance and counseling services; an indication that they have negative perceptions of the guidance and counseling services. A study by Momanyi (2013) which sought to investigate perceptions of teachers and students towards guidance and counseling services in public secondary schools also established that most of the students (60.2%) avoided G&C services for fear that whatever they discuss with the teacher counselors would find its way to other teachers or school administration.

Why do students avoid seeking for guidance counseling services in secondary schools?

Student respondents were asked to tick against the factors hindering students from making use of guidance and counseling from a provided list. This question also sought to get insights on the attitudes of students toward guidance and counseling. Table 3 below summarizes the responses.

Table 3: Factors hindering students from seeking for guidance and counseling services

Factors hindering students from seeking G & C services	Female Students		Male Students	
	Frequency	% (within the group)	Frequency	%(within the group)
Fear of teacher counselors	30	27.5	35	38.5
Lack of Confidentiality	58	53.2	46	50.5
Counselor being of opposite gender	43	39.4	34	37.4
G & C is for undisciplined students	62	56.8	53	58.2
Lack of appropriate time for G & C	61	55.9	39	42.8
No time allocated for counseling	33	30.3	2	30.7
Lack of a private counseling room	55	50.5	41	45.1

The main factors hindering students from seeking for guidance and counseling services were identified as: Lack of Confidentiality, Fear of teacher counselors, perception of G & C as a service only for undisciplined students, Lack of a private counseling room, Lack of appropriate time for G&C, Counselor being of opposite gender and having no time allocated for counseling. These findings show that students' perceptions of counseling have not changed since Gitonga (1999) conducted a study in the same district and found out that generally students were unwilling to admit that they had problems. They had a wrong notion on what guidance and counseling was all about and so they were afraid of being seen with the teacher counselor or in the counseling room. From the Client centred theory perspective, the lack of confidentiality and fear of teacher counselors is a situation of concern in regard to the competency of teacher counselors. A qualified counselor must be able to show unconditional positive regard and empathy; without which no counseling can take place.

8.3 Competency of Guidance and Counseling Teachers

The second objective was to establish the competency of guidance and counseling teachers in public secondary schools. As indicated in the review of literature, to conduct counseling effectively one requires good knowledge of the counseling theories, dynamics of human behavior, diagnostic and behavioral intervention techniques. The table below presents teacher-counselors' training on guidance and counseling in Meru Central District.

Table 4: Professional Qualifications of Teacher-Counselors

Professional Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Masters Degree in Counseling	2	10
Degree in Counseling	1	5
Diploma in Counseling	2	10
Certificate in Counseling	3	15
No training in Counseling	12	60
Total	20	100

The data in table 4 shows that majority of teacher-counselors (60%) have no training in counseling while the minority (40%) of the teachers have at least a certificate in counseling. All the teachers with some training acknowledged that the knowledge and skills acquired in their training was very

useful in helping students. Although most of the teachers reported that they have attended at least a workshop or seminar, the findings here generally imply that school guidance and counseling program implementation is done by unqualified personnel and therefore student needs cannot be addressed adequately.

Preparedness of teacher counselors to deal with students' guidance and counseling issues

Teacher respondents were asked to rate their preparedness to help students with needs and issues such as: Academic achievement/Career guidance, indiscipline and conduct disorder, drug and substance abuse, crisis management such as riots/strike, relationships & love issues, bullying and discrimination. Majority of teacher counselors (60%) reported that they were adequately prepared to help students with their academic/career achievement, while an average of 50% of them felt they were fairly prepared to handle indiscipline issues such as drug and substance abuse. But majority of the teachers (75%) acknowledged that they were poorly prepared for crisis management such as student riots and strikes. Generally, these findings suggest that students' psychological, emotional, personal/ social and academic/career needs are inadequately addressed in Kenyan schools. Perhaps this is why there has been an upsurge of student indiscipline involving even destruction of property and life.

8.4 Challenges faced by Guidance and Counseling Teachers in Public Schools

To find out the challenges teacher counselors face in public secondary schools was the third objective of this study. Interview information from teacher counselors revealed that they faced the following challenges:

i) Identity and Role Ambiguity

Guidance and Counseling teachers play two roles; that of a teacher first and that of a counselor second which sometimes brings about confusion. In addition, the appointment criteria of these G&C teachers are not clear. Interest and personality of the teacher are the main consideration for appointment of school counselors according to most respondents (65%), while training in counseling (25%), gender (30%) and religious factors (20%) are also minimally considered. Teacher counselors have no additional pay except a few (25%) of them who get the usual allowances of a school head of a department upon confirmation by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC). All respondents (100%) reported that the school guidance and counseling program is not harmonized; each school plans for its activities in its own way.

As earlier noted, School Counselor's role ambiguity had been avoided in the United States by 2002 when over 49000 certified and licensed school counselors were employment full time in public schools (Carey & Martin, 2015). Kenya should also recognize school counseling as a profession in its own right in order to adequately address student needs.

ii) Inadequate time for guidance and counseling

On the question of how often teacher counselors engaged in student guidance and counseling activities, majority (59%) reported that there was no specified time for guidance and counseling in the schools. Student needs were addressed as they arose or when students are referred for counseling. This lack of counseling timetable promotes the perception that guidance and counseling is meant for only students with problems which most students have as already noted. It also means the role of the teacher counselor is reduced to a responsive service whereas enough time of working with students would prevent some student behavioral problems, for instance. Further probing

however revealed that teacher counselors' work load was the real problem, because they must attend classes and other duties including co-curricular activities. The Client Centred theory first condition for constructive change to occur in the counselee is a *Relationship* or a sufficient psychological contact between the counselor and the counselee. Based on this theory, generally, there is little or no counseling that takes place in our secondary schools

iii) Inadequate Facilities for Student Guidance and Counseling

Respondents were asked whether they had specific private rooms for student counseling. This question sought to explore the extent to which confidentiality is maintained in school counseling. It was established that 80% of the schools did not have specific private room for student counseling. This implies that guidance and counseling records are also not confidentially kept. Indeed, lack of confidentiality as a hindrance to students' seeking of counseling services was reported by majority of girls (53.2%) and boys (50.5%). Students deserve professional counseling to ensure they are served in a comfortable private room where they can feel at ease to discuss their concerns and experiences with the counselor.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore barriers to effective guidance and counseling in secondary schools in Meru Central District. In regard to the first objective, it was established that minority of the students frequently use the services while majority seek for the services either rarely or never. Half of the teacher-counselors concurred that most students rarely seek for guidance and counseling services. The factors that hinder students from seeking for guidance and counseling services are Lack of Confidentiality, Fear of teacher counselors, perception of G&C as a service only for undisciplined students, Lack of a private counseling room, Lack of appropriate time for G&C, Counselor being of the opposite gender and having no time allocated for counseling. The first two factors are an indication that teacher counselors show little or no unconditional positive regard and empathy; the Client Centred theory essential conditions for effective counseling.

Concerning the competence of teacher counselors, only about one third of them have some training in counseling and the rest have no related training. Majority of the teacher counselors acknowledged that they were poorly prepared for crisis management such as student riots and strikes. Generally, these findings suggest that students' psychological, emotional, personal/ social and academic/career needs are inadequately addressed in Kenyan schools.

The last objective was to establish the challenges faced teacher counselors in public secondary schools. The following were found to be the main challenges:

(i) Identity and role ambiguity of School Counselors – The school counselors are identified first as teachers and second as counselors. Interest and Personality of the teacher are the main criteria for appointment but training, gender and religion are also minimally considered. School guidance and counseling program is not harmonized, every school plans for its own activities. The existence of identity and role confusion hinders the effectiveness of teacher counselors in addressing student needs as evidenced by over 30% students who reported that they fear teacher counselors.

(ii) Inadequate time for guidance and counseling – because of the teacher counselors' work load for they are assigned other duties such as attending classes and co-curricular activities.

(iii) Inadequate Facilities for Guidance and Counseling - Over 80% of the schools do not have specific private room for student counseling which compromises confidentiality – a necessary condition for professional counseling. Lack of confidentiality was actually identified by both girls (53.2%) and boys (50.5%) as one of the hindrances to students' seeking of counseling services.

9.2 Recommendations

Guided by the above findings it is recommended that:

i) The Government of Kenya comes up with transformative school guidance and counseling policy that will make professional counseling mandatory in all public secondary schools. Design and implement a comprehensive Guidance and Counseling program firmly grounded on the principles of human growth and development.

ii) Employ well trained and qualified school counselors on full time basis in all public school secondary schools to implement the comprehensive guidance and counseling program referred in recommendation (i) above.

iii) Create awareness among secondary school students about the purpose and importance of guidance and counseling in order to improve their use of G&C services. Extend the sensitization to other stakeholders: teachers, support staff, parents and members of the boards of management since they directly or indirectly influence students' attitudes toward guidance and counseling.

iv. Provide enough guidance and counseling facilities; particularly a specific private room for student counseling in every public secondary school.

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