The Impact of TikTok on English Language Learning and Cultural Connectivity in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of TikTok on English Language department students in terms of their learning and cultural sharing with other speakers. To achieve the objectives, a questionnaire consisting of Google Forms was used to gather information from 116 university students in Kurdistan. The study sought to answer two main questions; (1) to what extent do students benefit from using TikTok to improve their English Language skills? And (2) How does TikTok contribute to the development of cultural awareness and connectivity with other English Language speakers? According to the findings, TikTok helps in learning casual English language skills like listening to authentic dialogues, colloquialisms, and real-life usage. However, it does not help much in mastering formal language skills as the students discovered. Students have learned idioms and dealt with real life situations on this platform besides its perceived weakness as a structured language learning environment due to its entertainment orientation. The findings regarding its impact on cultural sharing reveal that TikTok offers limited avenues for cultural interaction. While students pointed out that the platform offers some level of cultural awareness as well as opportunities to display and view other cultures, the level of cultural interaction is quite superficial. This is probably because the content is produced in an informal, disorganized, and decentralized manner. Ultimately, Future research should study how TikTok can be modified for more organized educational reasons, increasing its potential as a good learning platform.

KEY WORDS: TikTok, English language Learning, cultural connectivity, quantitative research, cultural interaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital connectivity is ever-shaping and growing, and more importantly, TikTok has grown beyond its ability to entertain to become a powerful force shaping language Learning in globalization. The content on TikTok, in turn, is like being transported into the world of language learning-entirely unaware. Moreover, TikTok presents a topological disruption of language learning due to its novel ways of using language, slang, and colloquial expressions. Based on this, two fundamental research questions that serve as the foundation for conducting the current research will be as follows:

1. To what extent does TikTok affect students in the English language department in the Kurdistan region to learn English language?

2. What's the effect of TikTok on students' foreign culture learning and sharing their own cultures?

1.1 Identifying the Gap: The Regional Perspective

Since there is almost no research done in the Kurdistan region to highlight the importance of the TikTok application on improving students' English language skills and its effect on students' cultural connectivity and sharing with the users of TikTok worldwide, this research was conducted to fill in this gap in the Kurdistan region and to find the answers to the raised research questions.

1.2 Hypothesis:

We further hypothesize that the unique way TikTok combines entertainment and education would contribute much to learning the English language. On the other hand, TikTok also acts as a different agent in shaping the linguistic landscape in the Kurdistan region, hence contributing to nuanced understanding of language learning in this particular cultural and educational

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context. We hope in charting this new terrain, our contribution will be not only to an academic debate about linguistic evolution but also providing practical insight for educators, researchers, and policy makers who have to grapple with an ever-changing landscape with regard to language Learning in our digital era.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 TikTok's Linguistics and Cultural Impact

TikTok has grown from a trend-setting entertainment platform in the modern digital world to an interactive domain that has implications for language Learning and intercontinental connections. Given the importance of understanding the role this social media giant is starting to play, we probe how TikTok shapes language learning and cross-cultural understanding.

2.2 Establish Relevance

It was also of paramount importance to explore the influence of TikTok on the learning of the English language and cultural connectivity. Understanding both the possible benefits and challenges presented by TikTok would guide educational practice with ways in which to improve language Learning.

2.3 Literature Review

Basically, Vázquez-Calvo et al. (2022) show how TikTok simplifies cultural representations while making space for diverse experience and intercultural identity negotiation. In the study by Lee (2023), users are found adapting to the app, demonstrating the constant interplay between design and user interaction on a platform.

2.4 Target English Language Learning

Indeed, these findings by Yang 2020 prove that secondary-school students hold positive views regarding the efficacy of TikTok as a tool for learning English, and this fact justifies, even more, the potential integration of TikTok into language education strategies according to Aji & Setiyadi 2020. Various studies have shed light on the versatility of TikTok for learning Indonesian and Arabic, dancing, and the writing of descriptive text, among other skills, as highlighted by Taubah 2020, Luisandrith & Yanuartuti 2020, Nabilah et al. 2021, Zaitun et al. 2021, and Pratiwi et al. 2021. These all collectively point toward the great role that TikTok can play in enhancing basic English language skills.

2.5 Cultural Connectivity

This is further supported by the research of Zaitun et al. (2021), in which TikTok is to be researched for a place it plays in enhancing speaking skills in EFL students. This, therefore, furthers research into cultural connectivity. The appeal by Pachucki and Breiger (2010)

is for an integrated understanding of the influence of digital belongings on social participation and cohesion.

This literature review bridges the academic discourse through a unique focus on TikTok and adds nuance to the role that social media plays regarding language Learning within the Kurdistan region. It thus stands in complement to the emphasis of Monica-Ariana and Anamaria-Mirabela (2014) on the diverse implications of social media platforms in relation to language learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Using a quantitative research design, this study aims to investigate the impact of using TikTok on learning English and connecting culture among students attending departments for teaching or studying in the field of English language within Kurdistan Region. Research Questions: The research had two main questions it was trying to answer:

1. How much TikTok is effective for acquiring the English language from the perspective of students in the Kurdistan Region?

2. To what extent does TikTok as a social media contribute in mapping out new linguistic landscapes of cultural networks and cultural sharing among students, this study focuses on English Language department and within this context oriented sociolinguistic research?

Five sub-questions asked about more detailed areas of measurement, in order to better understand students answers and gain insight on student perspective/experiences related with TikTok in each research question.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Participants In this study, 116 students at three academic institutions in the Kurdistan Region (Salahaddin University, Noble Technical Institute and Raparin University) were examined. Since the students belonged to departments of English language, they formed a pertinent and focused sample for this study. Participants who were easily accessible and whose data was willingly contributed to the study served as convenience sampling. The focus was to select students in the English language department in various institutions and universities for answering the research questions as it's more related to them as language learners and to get valid data despite their different academic levels.

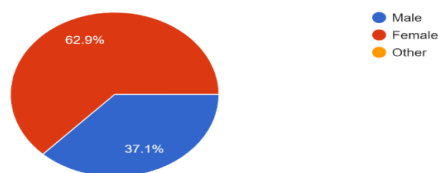Gender: The sample included 62.9% females (n = 73) and 37.1% males (n = 43).

Gender
116 responses

Figure 1 Gender

3.3 Age Range:

Most of the respondents were between 20 and 30 years. Furthermore, 42 students were less than 20 years, most of whom would have been university students. Remaining 1 student was in the category of 30-40 years and another 2 students fell under the category of 40-50 years.
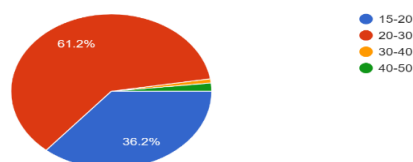
Age Range
116 responses

Figure 2 Age Range

3.4 Institutional Representation

Participants were recruited from 3 institutions as follows:
1-Raparin University: 74 students, representing 71.2% of the total answerers.
2-Noble Technical Institute: 25 students made up for the total by (24%).
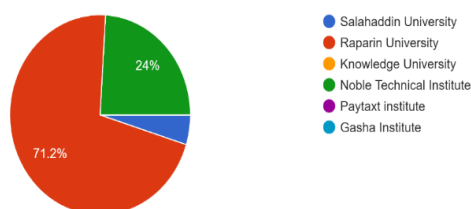3-Salahaddin University: 5 students participated (4.8%).

University or Institution Name
104 responses

Figure 3 Institutional Representation

3.5. The Used Instrument and Data Collection Process

We collected the research data through a structured questionnaire, developed and distributed by us in Google forms. The questionnaire corresponds to the two research questions was split into 2 sections The questions were grouped into sections, which had five sub-questions each and all linked to exploring the impact of TikTok on learning English languages for academic connection between students.

Likert Scale was used for response options:

Responses varied from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree for items specific to American English.

For questions regarding cultural connectivity and TikTok, answers went from Not at all to A little, Somewhat, A lot and lastly a great deal.

These are the scales in which participant responses were scored, thus making it more easily quantifiable prejudices and experiences. The questionnaire was prepared in an electronic format so that it could be easily accessed by all students from three universities, distributed via the Google Forms.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The appropriate institutions approved the study after ethics review
1-Raparin University: This was granted by a faculty member.
2-Salahaddin University: A faculty member gave permission to distribute the questionnaire.
3-Nobel Technical Institute: Approved by the Head of English language department, Shewaz Mustafa Ismael. A copy of the study information sheet was provided to participants, and they were told that their involvement in this research project is completely voluntary. Participants were told their responses would be anonymous and confidential, that they could leave the study any time.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data was processed by Google form as it formulated the charts and visualizations based on students' responses. Then the researcher analyzed the results based on the formulated charts which were very clearly formed and the percentage is written for each response.

Responses across the five-point Likert scale for each item were analyzed separately.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Findings and Interpretation for the First Research Question

The first research question asked "How much does TikTok affect English language learning for students in the Kurdish Region of Iraq Department of Learning Language? In order to answer this question, the survey asked 5 sub-questions about different aspects of TikTok used in learning languages from which interesting but not straightforward results were found.

4.1.1 Sub-question 1: What aid does TikTok provide to students majoring in the English language department at universities across Iraqi Kurdistan region for improving their skills in English?

Most students were not so convinced that they could improve their English using TikTok. Thirty-six students (29%) reported that TikTok helped "not at all" in improving their skills; 38 students (37.5%), indicated that it only helps a little, and one student answered the question with zero usefulness of TikTok as an educational resource for them within this context Table 3). Twenty-five students (21.6%) answered "somewhat" and 19 students thought that it helped them "a lot." In all, 8 students (6.9%) claimed TikTok had initially helped them improve their English skills "a great deal."
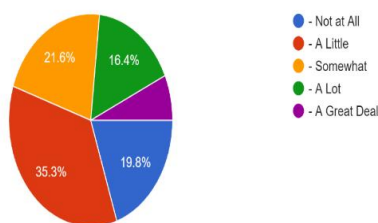

Figure 4 Sub-question 1

It is evident from our results that the app will not work for every student in aiding language enhancement as it may be helpful to some but most students do not consider TikTok's of much use in facilitating language learning. The most common answer is "a little" and this indicates that, in general appearance based on the data I collected through my 17-question survey of a small sample size (82/150), TikTok seems to be more flexible for casual learning than it does as an English Language Learning resource.

4.1.2 Sub-question 2: Does TikTok make the process of learning English more fun for students in an academic department (i.e. Language Department) in the Kurdistan Region?

As regards whether TikTok makes English learning more fun, 13students (11.2%) strongly disagreed and that it brings some interesting to learn English for 24 students (20.7%). 40 students (34.5%) chose neutral, 29 students (25.0%) agreed and 10 more with strong agreement
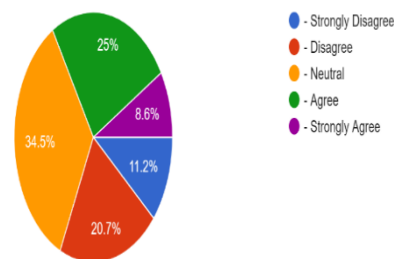

Figure 5 Sub-question 2

This distribution shows some recognition that TikTok might be able to engage students in the learning of English; the majority are ambivalent or unconvinced. The large percent of students responding "neutral" might mirror the duality existing in the platform-that while it is entertaining, just how much of an educational tool it would prove to be is yet not quite clear to most of them.

4.1.3 Sub-question 3: To what extent does TikTok include different content materials that improves English Learning for ELS in the Kurdistan Region?

Finally, while only 21.5% of the participants chose "yes" to TikTok providing students with diverse content for English learning; on being asked if this enhances their LEA, then regarding items when least no-expression or miscomprehension (not at all) was selected by previous count individually as"18 students;15. In comparison, 27 students (23.3%) rated it as "somewhat" and only a slightly smaller number of people at all found TikTok offers them an exceptional amount — just another 26 individuals total â€" diverse content Of the small group of 10 students (8.6%) answered in a slightly positive way and they believed TikTok is really helpful for learning English as much as possible…
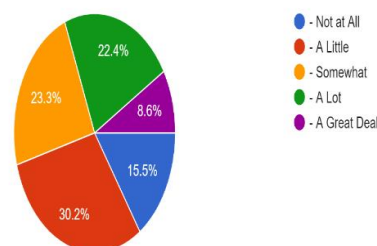

Figure 6 Sub-question 3

This demonstrates that students see TikTok as a way of exposing them to different English, but only in some capacities. The data hint that while TikTok has a good mix of content, it is degree to which this helps in developing English language for majority of the students does not cut.

4.1.4 Sub-question 4: Do TikTok expose the students of English language department in Kurdistan to various ways people speak, e.g. slang and informal words?

Regarding exposure to different types of English, such as slang and colloquial language only 22 students (19%) stated "not at all" compared with the large number who said when it comes to more everyday communication nearly two thirds state that they are rarely or never exposed. Twenty-four students (20.7%) said "somewhat," 21 students (18.1%), were at the level of intensity where they responded, "a lot" or "a great deal."
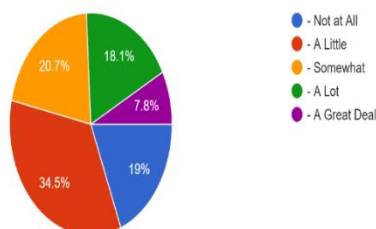

Figure 7 Sub-question 4

These data suggests that TikTok is being used as an exposure to everyday and informal forms of English, although moderately so. However, a number of students claimed that they at least partially exposed to different English dialects and colloquial language which is consistent with the amorphous nature of TikTok as an app for sharing user-generated content on social media. Nonetheless, it is somewhat a narrower take which dominates the investor's view as more of an exposure.

4.1.5 Sub-question 5: do you think TikTok aids students in the Kurdistan Region to use the language in real life contexts?

The last sub-question inquires whether TikTok helps students use English in real-life situations. Almost one-tenth (11 students) or 9.5% strongly disagreed, and about a fifth of the medical college student community —26 students—disagreed that discipline should be enforced through fear on them as interns. Twenty-nine percent of students (34) were neutral regarding empathy, 27% (31) agreed with the statement and approximately 12 % reported strongly agreement;
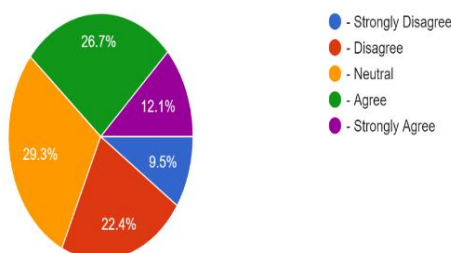

Figure 8 Sub-question 5

These results suggest that a lot of students are undecided or neutral, but there is promise for using TikTok to help them in practicing their English out-of-class. At the very least, this suggests TikTok has potential in pushing for a more everyday and imperiled use of English (serious language study would probably be somewhere else).

4.1.6 Whole Discussion & Outcome

For the first research question, taken together across data sources, findings present a moderately promising perspective about TikTok as medium of English language learning among students in Kurdistan Region. Many students commented that it was only a little or somewhat helpful with their English, which implies that while TikTok can have educational benefits but is not replacing other tools as the main avenue to study language.

Students were more ambivalent about improving the fun of learning, with a significant percentage selecting "neutral" before or after gameplay. Similarly, a subset of the students recognized TikTok for what it is; another platform that broadens their perspective and exposure to colloquial English. A clear minority recognized the way TikTok might be used to scaffold real-life English use; but for many, this was still as alien a concept as anything else.

In full, it seems the verdict is slightly more positive than negative for this research question with only a small amount of students seeing no value in TikTok as an English learning tool. But it is a platform most agree falls far short of the general sense that students do not see Kahoot as an in-depth educational tool, but more like anecdotal polishing for their classroom learning. It influences… well, sort of influence: thus, while TikTok could enhance our language learning in various informal ways its impact will be I suspect at best generally modest for most learners.

4.2 Findings and Interpretation for the Second Research Question

The second research question was "How does TikTok help in the development of linguistic landscape and cultural connectivity, especially amongst English department students in an under-researched area? This was broken down into five sub-questions, that aimed to ascertain the impact of TikTok in relation to cultural exchange and understanding among students in Kurdistan Region.

4.2.1 Sub-question 1:

Does TikTok assist students from department of English language in Kurdistan to exhibit and disseminate their own social heritage (Culture) with other people?

Similarly, when asked whether TikTok lets students demonstrate and show their cultural practices, 17 students or 14.7% responded "not at all," while 30 students or 25.9% felt it did "a little." Twenty-nine

students or 25% responded "somewhat," 25 students or 21.6% said "a lot," while 15 students or 12.9% indicated "a great deal."
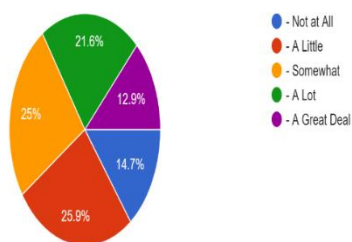

Figure 9 Sub-question 1

The results suggest that either most students see TikTok more as a space to show off their culture, or they are not able to tell yet what kind of place it is. A majority of students (66%) still indicated they had either a little or somewhat cultural interest from TikTok, implying that although there may be the potential to use TikTok for reasons on behalf of culture sharing; it nonetheless has been factually not seized altogether likely because several are uninformed about one another's cultures and don't take a casual video-sharing app as an opportunity.

4.2.2 Sub-question 2:

How much does TikTok facilitate Kurdistan English language department students learn and appreciate the cultural practices from English-speaking regions? Sub-question 1

With respect to leaning about and appreciating cultural practices of English-speaking regions, 9 (7.8%) did not at all compared with 40 students (34.5%), which had a little idea The results were as follows: 26 students (22.4%) answered "somewhat," 30 students (25.9%), selected "a lot" and only, not surprisingly per the study design11 students (9.5%) chose" a great deal".
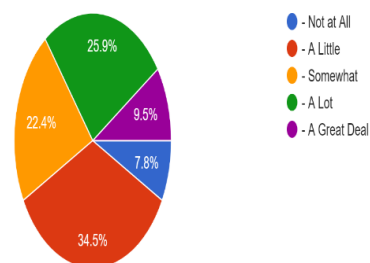

Figure 10 Sub-question 2

This suggests that although international perspectives and English-speaking cultures are made more available to TikTok, students do not see it as a particularly major proportion of exposure (low-moderate percentage).

Several students stated that they learned "a little" or at least "somewhat" about various traditions, but few believed the popular app taught substantive lessons on culture. That speaks to the platform's broader emphasis on short, casual content which may not provide a steady stream of real cultural snapshots.

4.2.3 Sub-question 3:

Do you feel that TikTok broadens the scope of cross-cultural communication between ELT students at universities in Kurdistan and their counterparts based elsewhere from native English-speaking cultures?

As for cultural exchange, 17 students (14.7%) replied "never," and another 36 students (31. One hundred fifteen students (98.3%) disagreed the least that TikTok benefits cultural exchanges, 41 of which selected "a little bit", and 33 students (28.4%) chose "somewhat" if they agreed it does; Twenty people who picked "much" or ten responses as "very much".
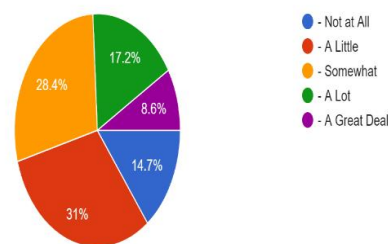

Figure 11 Sub-question 3

The results suggest that students embrace the possibility of TikTok to be facilitative with culture, but see it as far from exhaustive. This also reflects more among students, as TikTok connects people across geographies but does not entirely support an intense cultural exchange for most with much of the feedback in "a little" and somewhat. That a relatively small number of students described cultural interaction as "a lot" or" a great deal "suggests for some, but not all, the platform facilitates such exchange.

4.2.4 Sub-question 4:

To what extent do you agree that TikTok helps Kurdish students of English language department in identifying commonalities and differences between their own culture with those associated with the use of English?

For understanding cultural similarities and differences, 18 students (15.5%) said "not at all," and 32 students (27.6%) said "a little." Another 32 students (27.6%) responded "somewhat," 24 students (20.7%) selected "a lot," and 10 students (8.6%) indicated "a great deal."
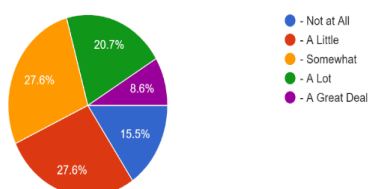
Figure 12 Sub-question 4

The answers demonstrate that only a majority believe TikTok is useful in gaining some understanding of similar and differing cultures. Nearly all (91%) respondents suggested at least some cultural awareness from the app, but most also said TikTok offered 'a little' or only contributed to their learning on this front "somewhat." Something which implies that TikTok has the capacity to facilitate cross-cultural empathy, but its content might not extend quite far enough for rich cultural comparisons.

4.2.5 Sub-question 5:

Do you think that TikTok has an influence in the shared cultural understanding between English department students across campuses within Kurdistan and with other communities who speak English as a first language?

15 students (12.9%) responded "not at all" when being asked about shared cultural understanding and 40 students (34.5%) chose "a little". Twenty-eight students (24.1%) stated they had "somewhat," 22 students (19%), stating a lot, and 11 students (9.5% of them) said responded with 'a great deal'.
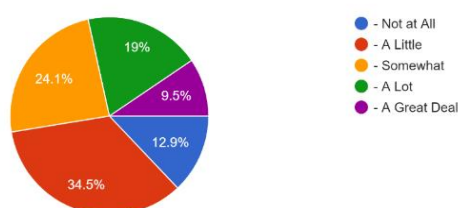

Figure 13 Sub-question 5

The results suggest a minority of students have realized TikTok's potential in contributing to a shared cultural understanding (37), with the bulk not very convinced. It is more of a soft influence and does not seem to lead most students towards making strong or long-lasting cross-cultural connections, as the majority have answered either "a couple" (44.2%) or "somewhat" likely (36%).

4.2.6 Final Outcome and Overall Discussion

Overall findings for the second research question reveal that TikTok has a minimal yet existing role in shaping the linguistic landscape and fostering cultural connectivity among students within the Kurdistan Region. While a fair number of the students believe that TikTok helps them show their culture and get to know other cultures, most describe these contributions as negligible or average. Most of the students replied that TikTok helps "a little" or "somewhat" in the process of cultural exchange and understanding, though relatively few felt the site plays a major role in fostering cultural connectivity.

The final outcome for this research question is slightly positive, but its influence is limited. The reasons could be that TikTok is, by its very nature, an entertainment platform, and by nature, cultural content is fragmented and informal. Besides, the casual and user-driven nature of TikTok content may not lend themselves to deep cultural exchange best provided by formal educational tools. But it does create cultural awareness and provides certain avenues for students to share other students' culture, although in a very limiting and informal manner.

5. CONCLUSION

Therefore, the present study explored how TikTok affects English language learning and cultural engagement with a focus on the contributions of this trending platform to linguistic development as well in cross-cultural practices among students in the Kurdistan Region. Results from the two research questions show that TikTok also functions within both contexts although with subtle and differentiated effects.

In terms of English learning, the results indicated that some participants identified TikTok as having a mild impact on language progression exposing them to new content types, expressions in less formal contexts and natural dialogue. Despite this, the influence of TikTok on students' language understanding is somewhat restricted. Given that much of this content is created with an aim other than teaching any specific topic or subject to users in an organized manner.

In terms of cultural engagement, however, the results demonstrate that whilst TikTok may provide students with opportunities to interact and share English-speaking cultures or their own practices on a shallow level. While many students mention that TikTok has some cultural awareness, very few classify it as a relatively strong platform for deeper-cultural and shared understanding of Kurdistan with English-speaking areas.

Ultimately, TikTok might be a valuable supplementary tool to learn languages and share cultures but is inadequate as a stand-alone platform of the same kinds. Such low-informal, entertainment-centric approaches relegate its role in supporting academic learning and cultural connectivity to secondary status compared with possibilities for social engagement or personal entertainment. In the future, research must

explore how academic use of social media platforms such as TikTok can be further optimized.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher has made the following suggestions which can be addressed in future researches in this area:
1. Investigating the role of TikTok on Vocabulary expanding for university students.
2. Examining the effect of live-streaming with native speakers on university students' speaking skill.

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