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Analysis of Arabic Language Learning Difficulties Among Eighth-Grade Students at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu

Asnal Matholib [a,1,*], Syarif Maulidin [b,2], M. Abdun Jamil [c,3]
[*abc] STIT Bustanul 'Ulum Lampung Tengah, Indonesia;
[1]asnalmatholib4@gmail.com; [2]maulidin@gmail.com; [3]abdunjamil@gmail.com;
* Correspondent Author;; asnalmatholib4@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the difficulties experienced by eighth-grade students in learning Arabic at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu, Subah District, Sambas Regency, during the 2025/2026 academic year. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation involving Arabic language teachers and students. The findings revealed that students encountered difficulties in several aspects of Arabic learning, including reading (qira'ah), writing (imla'), vocabulary mastery (mufradat), and grammar (qawa'id). These difficulties were influenced by internal factors, such as low learning motivation, limited interest in Arabic, and insufficient language competence, as well as external factors, including conventional teaching methods, limited use of educational technology, and a lack of Arabic language exposure outside the classroom. To overcome these challenges, several strategies were implemented, including providing additional learning guidance, developing instructional materials tailored to students' abilities, and creating an engaging and supportive learning environment. These efforts are expected to improve students' Arabic language proficiency and learning outcomes.

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Introduction

Arabic plays a crucial role in shaping the character and religious understanding of Muslims, particularly in Indonesia, where the majority of the population adheres to Islam. Arabic functions not only as a means of communication but also as the language of the Qur'an and the primary source of Islamic teachings, serving as the foundation for understanding Islamic creed (aqidah), worship (ibadah), and moral values (akhlaq) (Aladdin, 2023). Consequently, Arabic language instruction has been integrated into the national education system, particularly in Islamic educational institutions such as Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior secondary schools). As a formal educational institution, Madrasah Tsanawiyah plays a strategic role in equipping students with fundamental Arabic language skills that serve as a foundation for higher levels of education. However, empirical evidence indicates that Arabic language learning at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level is not always implemented effectively. Numerous studies have revealed that students frequently encounter difficulties in understanding, mastering, and

applying Arabic within educational contexts (Albantani & Madkur, 2018). These challenges often result in decreased learning motivation and lower academic achievement.

Learning difficulties in Arabic language education constitute a complex phenomenon influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include students' motivation, interest, aptitude, and cognitive abilities, whereas external factors encompass instructional methods, teacher competence, learning media, and the educational environment (Arifin & Setiawan, 2022). Teaching approaches that rely heavily on memorization and provide limited opportunities for communicative practice may lead to boredom and reduced student engagement. Conversely, innovative technology-based and communicative approaches have been shown to enhance the effectiveness of Arabic language learning (Albantani & Madkur, 2018). Furthermore, teacher competence represents a key determinant of successful Arabic language instruction. Teachers who possess strong pedagogical and professional competencies are better able to create conducive learning environments and provide constructive feedback to students (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). Supportive learning environments, both at school and at home, also contribute significantly to the development of students' language proficiency. The limited use of Arabic in daily communication remains one of the major obstacles to achieving language mastery among students (Effendy, 2021).

Specifically, students at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level often experience difficulties in vocabulary acquisition (mufradat) and writing skills (kitabah). Vocabulary-related difficulties include challenges in memorizing, understanding meanings, and applying vocabulary in sentences. Meanwhile, difficulties in kitabah are associated with limited mastery of grammatical rules (nahwu and sharaf), sentence structure, and the ability to organize ideas systematically in written form (Mustofa, 2020). This study will be conducted at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu, Subah District, Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan. The selection of this site is based on its relevance to the research context, accessibility for the researcher, and preliminary indications of challenges in Arabic language learning within the institution. Therefore, an in-depth investigation is required to identify the forms of learning difficulties experienced by students and the factors contributing to these difficulties.

Research on Arabic language learning difficulties has been widely conducted. Previous studies have found that students' primary challenges lie in linguistic aspects, particularly vocabulary mastery and sentence structure. Other studies have demonstrated that learning motivation significantly influences students' success in Arabic language acquisition. Furthermore, researchers have emphasized the importance of technology-based instructional media in enhancing students' interest and participation in learning activities. Studies focusing on kitabah have also revealed that writing difficulties are closely related to insufficient understanding of nahwu and sharaf principles (Mustofa, 2020). In addition, scholars have highlighted the importance of a language environment (bi'ah lughawiyah) in supporting students' language development. A conducive language environment enables students to practice and apply Arabic more frequently in their daily lives. Accordingly, the literature suggests that Arabic language learning difficulties are multidimensional and require comprehensive approaches for effective intervention.

Despite the growing body of research on Arabic language learning difficulties, most previous studies have been general in nature and have not specifically examined the local context of particular Islamic schools, especially in West Kalimantan. Existing studies tend to focus on isolated aspects such as teaching methods, learning motivation, or instructional

media without comprehensively integrating the interrelated factors influencing learning outcomes. Moreover, studies that simultaneously examine linguistic challenges, including mufradat, nahwu, sharaf, and kitabah, remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution by providing a more comprehensive and contextual analysis of Arabic language learning difficulties. It examines both linguistic and non-linguistic factors in an integrated manner within the specific context of MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu, Subah District, Sambas Regency, which possesses unique educational characteristics. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide deeper empirical insights and contribute to the development of more effective Arabic language teaching strategies.

Eighth-grade students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah are at a developmental stage where they encounter increasingly complex Arabic language materials, making learning difficulties more pronounced. Field observations indicate that students frequently struggle to understand instructional materials, master vocabulary (mufradat), apply grammatical rules (nahwu and sharaf), and develop writing skills (kitabah). These conditions underscore the need for a systematic investigation into the forms of difficulties experienced and the factors influencing them. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze students' difficulties in understanding Arabic learning materials, identify challenges in vocabulary mastery and usage, examine difficulties in applying nahwu and sharaf principles, and investigate obstacles related to writing skills (kitabah). Additionally, the study seeks to identify both internal and external factors influencing Arabic language learning difficulties among eighth-grade students at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu, Subah District, Sambas Regency. The findings are expected to serve as a basis for developing more effective, innovative, and student-centered Arabic language learning strategies.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of Arabic language learning difficulties experienced by students, encompassing both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects, based on their experiences, perceptions, and actual learning conditions. The descriptive approach was used to systematically and factually describe the forms of learning difficulties and the factors influencing them. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore the meanings and interpretations of participants more deeply, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research was conducted at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu, Subah District, Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The research participants consisted of eighth-grade students and an Arabic language teacher. The selection of eighth-grade students was based on the consideration that students at this level had already acquired foundational Arabic language knowledge from previous grades. Consequently, the difficulties they encountered were more likely related to complex aspects such as grammatical comprehension (nahwu and sharaf), sentence construction skills, and broader vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, students at this developmental stage possess more advanced cognitive and social abilities, enabling them to articulate their learning experiences more reflectively. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby individuals considered most relevant and capable of providing the information required to address the research questions were chosen. The criteria for student participants

included being enrolled in the eighth grade, demonstrating indications of difficulties in learning Arabic, and being willing to participate in the study. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when the collected data become repetitive and no longer yield significant new information (Patton, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018).

In addition to the students, the Arabic language teacher served as a key informant. Teachers play a crucial role in providing professional perspectives regarding students' learning difficulties, their underlying causes, and the instructional strategies implemented to address them. The involvement of the teacher enabled the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Arabic language instruction in the classroom, including challenges in delivering learning materials, the application of teaching methods, and efforts undertaken to overcome students' learning difficulties. Therefore, the data were derived not only from students' experiences but were also strengthened by the pedagogical perspectives provided by the teacher. The object of this study was students' difficulties in learning Arabic, including aspects related to understanding instructional materials, vocabulary mastery (mufradat), the application of grammatical rules (nahwu and sharaf), writing skills (kitabah), and the factors influencing these difficulties. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observation was conducted to directly examine the Arabic language learning process in the classroom, including interactions between teachers and students as well as the instructional methods employed. In-depth interviews were conducted with students and the teacher to explore learning experiences, challenges encountered, and the factors contributing to those difficulties. Document analysis was utilized to complement the data through the examination of documents such as syllabi, lesson plans, and students' learning outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing relevant information. The data were subsequently presented in narrative form to facilitate interpretation, followed by drawing conclusions based on patterns and relationships identified within the data. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation techniques were employed, including source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and time triangulation. These procedures enhanced the validity, credibility, and reliability of the research findings (Miles et al., 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results and Discussion

Based on the analysis conducted by the researcher, several learning difficulties experienced by eighth-grade students at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu, Subah District, Sambas Regency, were identified, along with the factors contributing to these difficulties in learning Arabic. The findings indicate that students encounter challenges in three main areas, namely reading and writing skills (imla' and qira'ah), vocabulary mastery (mufradat), and Arabic grammar (qawa'id). The first difficulty relates to reading and writing Arabic. Based on interviews with students, many reported that they experienced difficulties reading Arabic letters fluently and distinguishing between letters that have similar visual forms, such as ص–ش–س–ث and ض–ذ–د. As a result, students often lacked confidence when asked to read Arabic texts aloud in class. Classroom observations further revealed that many

eighth-grade students came from elementary school (SD) backgrounds and had not received formal Arabic language instruction before entering the madrasah. In addition, a considerable number of students showed limited interest in attending Qur'anic learning centers (TPA/TPQ) or studying the Qur'an independently. Consequently, Arabic was perceived as a foreign and unfamiliar language, making it difficult for students to read and comprehend Arabic texts. This situation had a significant impact on their classroom learning performance. Students who had prior exposure to Arabic generally demonstrated better comprehension of teachers' explanations than those without previous Arabic learning experience. Although Arabic had been taught during the seventh grade, many students continued to face substantial difficulties in reading Arabic texts. In terms of writing skills, several students struggled to recognize letter forms, connect letters correctly, master vocabulary, and construct simple sentences. They found it particularly challenging to write Arabic letters whose shapes change according to their position within a word, whether at the beginning, middle, or end. Furthermore, the findings indicated that most students experienced difficulties in writing vocabulary accurately, largely due to limited writing practice and the tendency to forget previously learned words.

Another major difficulty identified in this study was limited vocabulary mastery (mufradat). Interview results showed that students frequently struggled to remember and understand the meanings of newly introduced Arabic vocabulary. Memorizing and retaining vocabulary in a foreign language posed a considerable challenge for many learners. As a consequence, limited vocabulary knowledge hindered students' ability to comprehend reading passages and construct meaningful sentences. The existence of numerous irregular plural forms (jam' taksir) further complicated the vocabulary acquisition process. In addition, excessive smartphone usage emerged as a contributing factor. Many students spent a significant amount of time playing mobile games, which reduced the time available for studying and memorizing vocabulary. This habit negatively affected both their learning motivation and their ability to retain newly learned words.

The third difficulty concerns Arabic grammar (qawa'id). The interview findings revealed that students encountered substantial challenges in understanding Arabic grammatical structures, particularly nahwu and qawa'id. Arabic sentence structures are highly inflectional, and changes in word forms, such as shifts from masculine (mudzakkar) to feminine (muannats) forms or from singular (mufrad) to plural (jamak) forms, often caused confusion among learners. At the eighth-grade level, students begin studying verb conjugation patterns, including fi'il madhi, fi'il mudhari', and fi'il amar, as well as various derivative forms (musytaqqat). Many students struggled to understand how word forms change according to pronouns (dhamir) and gender distinctions. Moreover, the concept of i'rab represented one of the most challenging aspects of Arabic grammar. Students found it difficult to identify grammatical functions such as fa'il (subject), maf'ul bih (object), mubtada' (subject of a nominal sentence), and khabar (predicate), as well as to determine the appropriate grammatical markers, including rafa', nashab, and jar.

Based on observations and interviews conducted at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu, the factors contributing to Arabic learning difficulties can be classified into internal and external factors. Internal factors include students' interest, motivation, and language competence. Many students perceived Arabic as a difficult and monotonous subject, which reduced their enthusiasm for learning. The belief that Arabic is inherently difficult often generated anxiety and lowered students' self-confidence. Furthermore, students demonstrated low

motivation because they considered Arabic to have limited relevance to their daily lives outside religious contexts. In terms of language competence, students had minimal opportunities to practice listening (istima') and speaking (kalam) skills beyond classroom instruction. This limited exposure reduced opportunities for developing communicative competence in Arabic.

External factors were also found to play a significant role in students' learning difficulties. One of the primary external factors was the teaching method employed in Arabic language instruction. The predominance of conventional lecture-based teaching and the limited use of interactive learning media, such as vocabulary games and digital learning applications, made the learning process less engaging and more difficult for students to understand. Interviews with teachers indicated that Arabic instruction remained largely traditional and lacked sufficient innovation. The integration of educational technology into Arabic language learning had not yet been optimized. Therefore, greater utilization of technology-based learning resources could enhance both the effectiveness and attractiveness of Arabic instruction. Additionally, strategies designed to increase student motivation, including rewards and positive reinforcement, should be implemented consistently. Another important external factor was the learning environment. Students had limited exposure to Arabic outside the classroom because there were few opportunities to interact with Arabic-speaking peers and limited access to Arabic reading materials. Moreover, inadequate family and community support for practicing Arabic in daily communication further restricted students' language development. To address these challenges, schools could organize Arabic Language Days, speech competitions, and Arabic-language wall magazines, while parents could be encouraged to support simple Arabic learning activities at home.

To overcome these learning difficulties, several strategies can be implemented. The first strategy involves providing additional academic assistance through teacher guidance and peer support. Collaborative learning activities, such as group assignments and study groups, can facilitate mutual assistance among students and improve their understanding of Arabic language concepts. The second strategy is to provide instructional materials that are appropriate to students' abilities and educational backgrounds. The findings indicate that textbooks play a crucial role in Arabic language learning; however, the currently used textbooks do not adequately accommodate students who have no prior experience learning Arabic. Therefore, Arabic teachers are encouraged to provide supplementary learning resources, such as Arabic dictionaries and teacher-developed modules tailored to students' needs and proficiency levels.

The third strategy involves providing greater attention to students and creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere. Educational experts emphasize that stimulating students' motivation and attention is an essential component of effective learning. Teachers should closely monitor students' progress so that learning difficulties can be identified and addressed promptly through consultation and individualized guidance. The findings demonstrate that students who understand learning materials well tend to develop positive attitudes toward the subject, whereas those who struggle with comprehension are more likely to dislike it. Consequently, one of the teacher's primary responsibilities is to foster students' interest in Arabic language learning. This objective can be achieved through sustained teacher support and creative instructional practices that promote an enjoyable classroom environment. The use of active and engaging learning methods is expected to

enhance student participation, strengthen motivation, and ultimately improve learning outcomes in Arabic language education.

The findings of this study indicate that eighth-grade students at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu experienced various difficulties in learning Arabic, particularly in reading (qira'ah), writing (imla'), vocabulary mastery (mufradat), and grammar (qawa'id). These difficulties were influenced not only by students' academic abilities but also by a combination of internal and external factors. The findings suggest that Arabic language instruction requires a more comprehensive and student-centered approach to effectively address learners' needs and improve learning outcomes. In terms of reading and writing skills (qira'ah and imla'), the findings revealed that many students struggled to recognize, distinguish, and pronounce Arabic letters with similar forms and sounds, such as ص، ش، س، ث and ض، ذ، د. Furthermore, students experienced difficulties in writing Arabic letters that change shape depending on their position within a word. This challenge was largely associated with the students' educational backgrounds, as most of them graduated from public elementary schools and had not received formal Arabic instruction prior to entering the madrasah. Consequently, Arabic was perceived as a new and unfamiliar language. This finding supports the study by Kurniawan (2022), which emphasized that students' prior learning experiences and interest in Arabic significantly influence their success in learning the language. Students with limited prior exposure and low interest tend to encounter greater difficulties in understanding Arabic language materials.

Another major challenge identified in this study was limited vocabulary mastery (mufradat). Interview data showed that students often found it difficult to memorize and retain newly introduced Arabic vocabulary, particularly irregular plural forms (jam' taksir). Insufficient vocabulary knowledge hindered students' ability to comprehend reading texts and construct simple sentences in Arabic. Vocabulary serves as a fundamental component in foreign language learning because it directly affects learners' comprehension and communication skills. Therefore, students with limited vocabulary mastery are more likely to struggle in understanding classroom instruction. In addition, excessive smartphone use for playing games was found to reduce students' study time and negatively affect their motivation to memorize vocabulary. This finding indicates that technological developments may become obstacles to learning when not utilized appropriately. As argued by Nurohman, Kurniawan, and Andrianto (2024), technology should be employed as an educational innovation that enhances learning effectiveness rather than distracts students from academic activities.

The findings also demonstrated that students experienced considerable difficulties in Arabic grammar (qawa'id). Many participants reported confusion when learning Arabic grammatical structures, particularly regarding changes in word forms according to gender, number, and grammatical function. The concept of i'rab, which requires learners to understand changes in word endings based on syntactic position, emerged as one of the most challenging aspects of Arabic learning. Such difficulties are understandable given the substantial differences between Arabic and Indonesian grammatical systems. Inayah, Amalia, and Kurniawan (2024) argued that one of the major challenges facing Islamic education in the twenty-first century is the need to bridge the gap between complex subject matter and the diverse characteristics of contemporary learners. Therefore, teachers are expected to employ innovative instructional strategies that facilitate students' understanding of abstract grammatical concepts.

The factors contributing to students' Arabic learning difficulties can be categorized into internal and external factors. Internal factors include low interest and motivation toward learning Arabic. Many students perceived Arabic as a difficult and monotonous subject, leading to anxiety and a lack of self-confidence. Such perceptions significantly reduced students' willingness to engage actively in the learning process. Previous research conducted by Kurniawan (2022) demonstrated that students' interest in learning Arabic has a significant positive effect on their academic achievement. Students with higher levels of interest generally achieve better learning outcomes than those with lower levels of interest. Consequently, increasing students' motivation and interest should be a primary concern in Arabic language instruction.

In addition to motivation, students' language competence also contributed to their learning difficulties. The lack of opportunities to practice listening (istima') and speaking (kalam) skills outside classroom hours limited students' exposure to authentic language use. As a result, their communicative competence developed slowly. Effective learning requires meaningful experiences that enable students to connect classroom content with real-life situations. Kurniawan, Nawawi, Andrianto, and Rohmaniah (2023) emphasized that contextual learning approaches can enhance students' understanding by linking learning materials to their daily experiences and environments. External factors identified in this study included teaching methods and the learning environment. Interviews with teachers revealed that Arabic instruction was still dominated by conventional lecture-based approaches. Interactive learning media and educational technologies were rarely utilized, causing students to become easily bored and making it difficult for them to understand the material. These findings indicate the need for instructional transformation toward more innovative and technology-enhanced learning models. According to Nawawi, Kurniawan, and Jamil (2023), education in the Society 5.0 era requires teachers to integrate technology into the learning process to increase effectiveness, engagement, and student participation. Therefore, the use of digital media, educational games, and Arabic language learning applications may provide effective alternatives for overcoming students' learning difficulties.

The learning environment also played a significant role in students' Arabic learning challenges. Students had very limited exposure to Arabic outside the classroom due to the absence of Arabic-speaking peers, a lack of Arabic reading materials, and insufficient family support. Consequently, opportunities to practice the language were restricted to classroom settings. Since successful language acquisition depends heavily on continuous exposure and practice, schools should establish an Arabic-supportive environment through programs such as Arabic Language Days, Arabic speech competitions, Arabic-language wall magazines, and extracurricular activities that encourage students to use Arabic more frequently. To address these learning difficulties, several strategies can be implemented. First, additional academic guidance should be provided to support students who encounter difficulties in learning Arabic. Such guidance may be delivered by teachers or through peer-assisted learning activities, including collaborative assignments and study groups. These approaches can help students overcome learning obstacles and improve their understanding of Arabic language concepts.

Second, instructional materials should be adapted to students' abilities and educational backgrounds. The findings indicate that the textbooks currently used are not fully appropriate for students who have no prior experience in learning Arabic. Therefore,

teachers should provide supplementary learning resources, such as Arabic dictionaries, simplified modules, and instructional materials specifically designed to meet students' learning needs. According to Ahmad Muktamar et al. (2024), effective learning requires instructional materials that align with students' characteristics and learning capacities to facilitate meaningful learning experiences.

Third, teachers should create a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Motivating students and maintaining their attention are essential elements of effective teaching. Teachers should provide continuous support, encouragement, and constructive feedback to help students overcome learning difficulties. The findings indicate that students who understand learning materials tend to enjoy the subject, whereas those who experience persistent difficulties often develop negative attitudes toward it. Therefore, one of the primary responsibilities of teachers is to foster students' interest and enjoyment in learning. Achieving this objective requires creativity, innovation, and the implementation of active learning strategies. This perspective is consistent with the student-centered educational philosophy advocated by Andrianto and Kurniawan (2025), which emphasizes the importance of creating learning environments that support students' holistic development and maximize their potential. Consequently, Arabic language instruction should focus not only on linguistic competence but also on enhancing students' motivation, confidence, and enthusiasm for learning the language.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that eighth-grade students at MTs YPPU Sapak Hulu experience various difficulties in learning Arabic, particularly in reading (qira'ah), writing (imla'), vocabulary mastery (mufradat), and grammar (qawa'id). Difficulties in reading and writing are primarily related to students' limited ability to recognize, differentiate, and write Arabic letters correctly, while limited vocabulary mastery hinders their ability to comprehend texts and construct sentences. Furthermore, students face considerable challenges in understanding Arabic grammatical structures, especially in relation to word inflection, verb conjugation, and the application of i'rab rules. These findings indicate that Arabic language learning remains a significant challenge for many students, particularly those with limited prior exposure to Arabic. The study also reveals that students' learning difficulties are influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include low interest and motivation toward learning Arabic, negative perceptions of Arabic as a difficult subject, and limited opportunities to practice listening and speaking skills. External factors consist of the continued use of conventional teaching methods, the limited integration of interactive learning media and educational technology, and the lack of an Arabic-speaking environment both at school and at home. These factors collectively contribute to students' low engagement and learning achievement in Arabic language education.

To address these challenges, several efforts are necessary, including providing additional academic guidance, developing instructional materials that correspond to students' abilities and educational backgrounds, and creating a more engaging and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Teachers are encouraged to adopt innovative, student-centered, and technology-assisted learning approaches that enhance students' motivation and participation. Moreover, schools should create supportive Arabic language environments through various language enrichment activities. Through these combined

efforts, Arabic language learning can become more effective, meaningful, and accessible, ultimately improving students' linguistic competence and overall learning outcomes.

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