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A STUDY TO INVESTIGATE THE PRODUCTIVENESS OF THE COMPULSORY ENGLISH COURSE IN ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to investigate the productiveness of Compulsory English courses taught at the undergraduate level in enhancing English language skills. The strengths and weaknesses of the course are analyzed to suggest improvements for the sake of developing undergraduate learners' English language skills. Due to globalization, the English language is becoming extremely valued and is thought to be a significant medium of international communication it is growing in the fields of technology, science, and education expressed that the demand for English language learning is growing as a second language (ESL). The sample of this study comprised the teachers who taught English compulsory at the undergraduate level and the ESL students enrolled in different colleges and universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The data collection tools used in this study included a questionnaire and classroom observation sheet. The findings of the study revealed that the English Compulsory course was fruitful for ESL learners partially, however, some amendments could make the course contents a lot better. Recommendations for improvement included practical application of the material with the use of activities in the class, an increase in the period of the course, and employment of the latest methods of teaching in the classroom. It should be the responsibility of the course and syllabus designers to conduct a need analysis to deduce the necessities of the students in the current and future situations. The course ought to be planned in a way that provides the integration of all the skills at a time.

Keywords: Lingua franca, integration, Globalization, Skills, Evaluation.

Introduction

Language is a unique human marvel. It is a dynamic, advantageous, and efficient correspondence device in the hands of people honored with exceptional capabilities to acquire distinctive languages. In today's globalized world, English as a second/foreign language is recognized as a lingua franca. Due to globalization, the English language is becoming extremely valued and is thought to be a significant medium of international communication and it is growing in the fields of technology, science, and education (Pica, 2000). Liu et al. (2011) expressed that the demand for English language learning is growing as a second language (ESL) and as a foreign language (EFL) all through the world. The courses of English language learning mostly fall into two classifications: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Purposes (EGP). The former highlights the set goals of learners for learning the English language whereas the other anticipates upgrading the learners' perceptions of English language learning. English for Specific Purpose (ESP) courses are designed for a specific group of learners in a specific context and the resources used are justified for learners' particular program of study. ESP is a specific term used for teaching and learning of English language for different purposes: EAP, EOP, and others. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is linked with those language abilities that are helpful for communication and are needed for academic purposes in formal instructional frameworks. The reason for conducting such courses is to enable the learners to read and write in English. Whereas English Compulsory courses emerged out of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and give special importance to units of language for their utility in everyday life. By this, the present study investigates the productiveness of the Compulsory English course taught at the undergraduate level. This is important to discover whether this course could assist students in achieving their set goals. Briefly, it unveils if this course needs

modification to the student's needs. It is observed that usually there are many ESP courses offered in different contexts, but the productiveness of these courses must be examined keenly. As ESP courses are designed to execute the particular purposes and needs of students, it is essential. According to Celce-Murcia (1991), "An effective ESP course does not involve mastering the learning material, instead mastering the learning skills" (p. 230); hence, learners are supposed to master the learning skills to meet their set goals. To help students in mastering learning skills and meet the set goals, the present study investigates the productiveness of undergraduate Compulsory English courses by examining the perceptions of the students and teachers, and the strengths and weaknesses of the course in relevance to the enhancement of language skills.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the students' and teachers' perceptions about the productiveness of the Compulsory English course in enhancing language skills
2. To investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the Compulsory English course

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of the students and teachers about the productiveness of the Compulsory English course in relevance to the enhancement of language skills?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the English Compulsory course?

Research Methodology

The present study utilized a pragmatic paradigm; both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered, and the data was triangulated in this way. As the research needs to answer the corroborative and fact-finding questions the researcher used the mixed method approach to give a more grounded interpretation of the research questions and demonstration of the findings of research in contrastive perspectives. The current study was conducted as a survey, and it used both quantitative and qualitative data (mixed

method approach). For collecting data, the researcher designed a questionnaire, and observation sheet to note the real classroom observations. The rationale behind selecting these instruments was that the researcher wanted to get diverse viewpoints on the marvel that was being investigated. The quantitative data was gathered through close-ended questions in the questionnaire, and qualitative data was gathered through classroom observations and open-ended questions in the questionnaire. Classroom observations were conducted to prevent research from bias and to approach the phenomenon without preconceived ideas. These instruments also helped the researcher in achieving the objectives that were set for this study.

Literature Review

The term English for Specific Purposes (ESP) includes the teaching and learning of English to fulfill the learners' professional needs of the future. The outlines or syllabus of such courses must be designed by keeping the demands of that particular profession into consideration. The syllabus of such courses must be based on the particular needs of learners from different fields of life. EAP (English for Academic Purposes), EST (English for Science and Technology), EBP (English for Business Purposes), and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) are some of the courses that are designed for different purposes to meet the particular needs of learners belonging to different sections of society (Chen, 2006). Khushi (2003) reviewed the ESL programs in diverse professional institutes in Pakistan which did not meet the needs of the learners in their academic and professional situations. In reality, the recommended English syllabus was not in line with the particular needs of the students because of the obsolete syllabus. She pointed out that diverse components of a syllabus like supporting activities focusing on purposeful components of language, have to be incorporated so one could meet the goals of

the learning. Such exercises would offer chances for learning, practice, and use of language skills. Furthermore, Ahmed (2005) conducted research in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) a case of legal English in which he estimated the level of present linguistic competence of learners in Pakistan. He examined the learners' linguistic needs in educational and professional situations. The researcher suggested a need-oriented course for implementation at authorized educational institutions and other organizations. He emphasized that the results of the study provided a clear view of the level of insufficiency in a diversity of regions associated with instructional and professional circumstances. Hassan (2005) designed an ESP syllabus for engineers, in which he stated that Pakistan lacked researchers who could satisfy the needs of different professional learners by designing particular courses for them. He emphasized that factors like shortage of resources, non-availability of course designers, and training chances for instructors have promoted this condition. He mentioned that ESP strategies must be an essential part of engineers' syllabus. He recommended that the ESP syllabus for engineering could be made better by way of extra teamwork and networking programs with educational institutes of international repute consisting of TAFE programs in Australia and New Zealand. Flowerdew (2005) explained that EBP (English for Business Purposes) apprehended the important methods for syllabus design. The author postulated the various models that help students to choose their professions. Kantonidou (2008) accompanied the study of ESP concerning the electrical engineering curriculum. The researcher concluded that theoretical work needs solid evidence. He acclaims by considering the inherent as well as external inspiration of the learners and the real performances coming out of the classroom must be considered even as planning the curriculum.

In the present study, the researcher utilized an eclectic approach by defining some most important characteristics of noticeable models which were designed to evaluate course and material. These newly discovered additives of the course and material should be given due consideration. For this study, the researcher immersed the multiple approaches by combining particular factors mentioned in old models. The principle purpose for utilizing this method is to study the additives which have by and large chosen by the different models and are blended as a new approach, and it includes all the fundamental factors for the evaluation of the course and material. In light of these additives, the Compulsory English course was evaluated by giving due consideration to the following points:

- Course Background
- Course Contents (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing Skills)
- Methodologies to Assist Teaching Process
- Assessment Criteria
- Needs of the students

Many course and syllabus evaluation studies have been conducted with various aspects, but the student and teachers' perspective on the productiveness of such courses in real-life teaching-learning scenarios to enhance language skills has gotten the least attention. The efficacy of such courses has been studied for different purposes like ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EGP (English for General Purposes), EAP (English for Academic Purposes), EOP (English for Occupational Purposes), EBP (English for Business Purposes), etc., but there have been very few official attempts made to look at the productiveness of such courses in enhancing the language skills of learners at undergraduate level. This study's goal was to address a gap in the body of knowledge about the productiveness of such courses in real-life teaching-learning scenarios to enhance the

language skills of undergraduate learners at private and public sector institutions of Lahore.

Methodology and Procedure

The participants of the current study were a sample of 300 students of the BS 4-year program (who were in the second year: fourth semester) belonging to different majors (such as English Literature, Urdu, Mathematics, Botany, Education, Economics, Geography and Mass Communication) and 30 teachers who were teaching the same Compulsory English course to these majors at different private and public sector institutes i.e., Government Postgraduate College for Women, Samanabad, Lahore, Government Islamia College for Women, Cooper Road, Lahore, and Lahore College for Woman University (LCWU), Lahore. The rationale behind selecting these institutes was that the same Compulsory English course was being taught at these institutes and they were following the same course material at the same time. These participants were selected as the representatives of the total population. The representative sample was selected through stratified random sampling as the researcher chose samples from different majors of the BS program who were learning the same Compulsory English course. After the collection of data, it was exposed for analysis using different techniques. The collected data was of two types qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative data was analyzed using statistical analysis software and the qualitative data was analyzed descriptively.

Results

Quantitative Results

The study aimed to evaluate the productiveness of the Compulsory English course offered at the undergraduate level in enhancing language skills through the perspectives of the students and the teachers. As stated in the previous chapter, the data was gathered using different tools including questionnaires and classroom

observation sheets. The questionnaire included two kinds of questions; close-ended and open-ended questions. Close-ended questions were based on the five Likert scale values ranging from Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Partially Agreed, Disagreed, and Strongly Disagreed. Keeping in view the eclectic approach developed by the researcher, the following components have been analyzed based on the collected data:

- a. Background of the course
- b. Contents of the course (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing Skills)
- c. Teaching Methodologies
- d. Assessment Criteria
- e. Needs of the students

Perceptions of the students and teachers about the productiveness of the Compulsory English course in relevance to the enhancement of language skills

Table 1: Background of the Course

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The outline of the Compulsory English course is provided in the class.	1.82	1.045
The Compulsory English course outline mentions the aims and objectives of the course.	2.10	1.032
The course outline provides a clear view of the plan such as mid-terms, final terms, assignments, quizzes, and recommended material.	2.05	1.053

Students thought that the course outlines with proper mention of the course objectives and plan were provided in the class. On the contrary, teachers were opinionated that they had to devise specific objectives from general objectives on their own, and they had to plan the course accordingly.

Table 2: Contents of the Course: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Different listening strategies are utilized to comprehend the material and listen for gist and specific information.	2.06	.914
Listening strategies enable me to comprehend and respond to provided instructions accordingly.	2.02	.901
I feel comfortable listening and understanding extensively in English.	1.85	.908
I can use English for communication and the expression of thoughts effectively.	2.12	.840
The course has made me able to speak with smooth use of connected speech.	2.23	.926
The course has made me able to pronounce English words correctly.	1.96	.897
The course enables me to read and comprehend the content critically.	1.99	.940
The course enables me to interpret the content.	2.02	.894
The course uses a variety of reading strategies to comprehend text and to enhance vocabulary.	2.08	.936
The course has helped me to identify and deploy basic writing skills.	2.10	.946
The course has helped me in writing reports, letters, applications, essays, CVs, dialogues, etc.	1.86	.897
The course has made me able to produce grammatically correct sentences.	2.06	1.022

The Compulsory English course focuses on learning and enhancement of language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The majority of students and teachers were of the view that the course focused more on writing and reading skills, the speaking skills were given very little attention while the listening skills were only based on theoretical knowledge, and no activities were conducted to enhance this skill.

Table 3: Teaching Methodologies

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The teacher utilizes different ways to engage students in the classroom.	2.15	1.046
The teaching methodologies utilized by the teacher are effective in enhancing language skills.	2.15	1.060
The teacher uses different aids while teaching like multimedia, overhead projectors, films, picture charts, etc.	3.12	1.317

The findings of the questions based on the utility of teaching methods suggested that students were not very satisfied with the teaching methodologies as most of the teachers used the old lecture method of teaching in which students' involvement was very less, and this made interesting lectures boring. On the other hand, teachers said because of the shortage of digital facilities in every class, teachers preferred the lecture method with the inclusion of some activities.

Table 4: Assessment Criteria

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Assessment is usually done by quizzes, assessments, presentations exams, etc.	2.04	1.050
The teacher gives students adequate feedback on performance.	2.17	1.072
HW/assignments are relevant to the course material and contents.	1.87	.941

To check the productiveness of the taught material assessment is usually taken. Most of the students agreed with the statements that they were assessed through relevant quizzes, assignments, presentations, and exams. Timely feedback enhanced the success rate but sometimes it was delayed from the teachers' side which created hindrances in the enhancement of knowledge more effectively. Teachers thought that they tried their best to provide timely feedback but sometimes it got delayed because of the burden of other tasks.

Table 5: Needs of the Students

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The course provides sufficient interconnections between theory and practice / practical application for me.	2.35	1.019
The course motivates further study and research.	2.43	1.059
The course is useful for the demand of the prospective job.	2.29	1.100

The findings gathered from students and teachers suggested that the course partially fulfilled the students' needs, as most of the

content was theoretical, and very little focus was given to the practical application of the content. In short, the course needed some modifications to stand truly in line with modern learners' learning needs.

Qualitative Analysis

Strengths and weaknesses of the Compulsory English course

Most of the students were satisfied with their course. They were well-opinionated about the strength of the course. According to them, there were some plus points of the course as it assisted in enhancing their skills and vocabulary to some extent, use of everyday language and simple and relevant material provided the base for the students' learning. As the material was relevant, it would be fruitful in the future. Moreover, presentations and class discussions boosted the confidence of students. Last but not least, the feedback from the teacher was very important for student's improvement and for boosting their creative abilities. Despite their satisfaction with the course, some students encountered difficulties with content and teaching methodologies. Students had problems with repeated material and pointless length which made the material uninteresting, the complexity and theoretical nature of the material made it impossible for students to enhance their skills and creative abilities effectively. Students also found it difficult to manage their time with their lengthy material. The utilization of old methods of teaching is another issue in the course as there was less focus on assignments, projects, activities, and class discussions.

Classroom Observations:

The researcher also conducted classroom observations to collect data for this study, the Compulsory English course classrooms were observed with the goal that the real happenings of the classes could be examined thoroughly. A total of six classes were observed. The observation was conducted by

using an observation sheet that emphasized the following aspects:

- Delivery of material
- Focus on skill/s
- Teaching methodologies
- Use of activities and tasks
- Teacher-student interaction
- Feedback from the teacher
- Strengths and weaknesses of the lectures/ material

The observation aimed to evaluate the teaching strategies employed by different teachers in teaching the Compulsory English Course. The study involved visiting various classrooms, taking observations, and analyzing teaching materials. The Compulsory English course teachers were chosen randomly to observe their classes. It was observed that most of the teachers (5 out of 6) started their lecture with an overview of the lesson to create interest and provide basic knowledge of the lesson. Most of the teachers (4 out of 6) linked new lessons with the previous lessons to activate and update the previous knowledge. Some teachers (2 out of 6) passively taught the material as they did not fully prepare their lecture before and were unable to grab the attention of students but on the other hand, most of the teachers (4 out of 6) prepared the lecture well before delivering it. It was observed that most of the teachers (4 out of 6) relied on the prescribed material but some teachers (2 out of 6) took examples from real-life experiences/ scenarios to grab the attention of students. Most of the time, students did not take interest in the topic because the teacher did not pay attention to students' class activities, unavailability of books for the students, and no encouragement of active learning. The unavailability of proper material for lessons was another point of observation. Most of the teachers (4 out of 6) prepared proper material while some teachers (2 out of 6) did not. There was no proper integration of every skill i.e. listening, speaking reading, and

writing. Only (1 out of 6) teachers focused on reading and speaking skills. Most of the focus in class was on writing skills, listening skills were ignored. Only (2 out of 6) teachers assigned homework to the students. It was observed that most of the teachers (5 out of 6) effectively managed their classrooms by maintaining discipline while fostering a positive learning atmosphere. Four out of six classrooms were teacher-centered as a lecture-based strategy was used that was less engaging for students. Few teachers (2 out of 6) incorporated active learning techniques such as group discussions. Some teachers (3 out of 6) discussed the previously studied text or gave examples from real life which promoted students for better involvement. It was observed that most of the teachers (5 out of 6) didn't force the non-participating students into discussion or provided the material difficult to understand at the BS level. Some of the mentioned weaknesses were observed while taking observation that none of the teachers employed any modern teaching strategy like, the use of multimedia, visual or audio aids to engage the students in improving their language skills. Also, none of them organized any type of activities, tasks, or formal discussions for a better understanding of topics.

Discussion

The aims and objectives of a course should give a clear impression to the students about its effectiveness as when they have completed their course they must have an idea about the skills and aptitudes the course visualizes for them. The investigation of the productiveness of the Compulsory English course showed that the students were not facilitated with the course outlines with proper mention of the course goals. Some students were notified that the goals of the course were not shared with them beforehand. Conversely, the teachers thought that they had to devise course goals themselves out of the general goals to teach each language skill. The outlines given by the

faculty to the students did not have clear course goals and the schedule like the dates for presentations, assignments, quizzes, tests, etc. The teachers had to inform the students verbally about the topics and schedule for the assessment. The responses of teachers showed that most of the teachers thought that the Compulsory English course emphasized two skills, i.e. reading and writing, while speaking skills and listening skills were less emphasized in the course. As opposed to it, [Cunningsworth \(1995\)](#) indicates that incorporated skills ought to be created in the courses. The majority of the students said that all four language skills were given equivalent significance in the class. There was a contradiction in the opinions of the teachers and the students, but observations also revealed that reading, writing, and speaking skills were emphasized while listening skills were not much emphasized. Enhancement of language skills needed a proper distribution of time. On the other hand, findings showed that the students and the teachers thought that the duration which is given to impart four language skills was not sufficient to handle all skills in time therefore, they suggested that the duration of the course ought to be increased from four to five or six semesters so that skills could be handled properly. Most students stated that the course emphasized practical activities that are useful for the requirement of the prospective job in the future. On the contrary, the teachers' responses showed that the course reflected the students' needs for professional life to some extent only. Therefore, it was suggested that the Compulsory English course ought to deal with particular goals rather than general goals. Correspondingly, [Munby \(1978\)](#) reveals, after empathy of ESP, in both professional and academic situations, inquiries were invited that ascertain particular areas of the study. It was observed that some of the contents of the course were relevant to the professional career. Contrary,

some students report that some sections of the course were associated with the students' daily lives. It was suggested by the students that the course ought to be improved and the pertinent contents ought to be supplemented in the revised course. [Cunningsworth \(1995\)](#) suggested that syntactic items ought to be incorporated by considering the needs of the students. The course content ought to include the material to teach how to participate in class discussions. In the same way, [Hutchinson & Waters \(1987\)](#) highlighted that the course contents must be appropriately organized all through the materials. The contents of the course should be arranged properly throughout the books and the units. [Nunan \(1988\)](#) stated that one ought to remember what the students needed to with the language skills and courses ought to be composed in light of need analysis. It was observed that the majority of the teachers followed the lecture method in the classrooms to teach language skills. This method was not very effective in grasping the attention of the students toward learning. [Cunningsworth \(1995\)](#) proposes that the skills ought to be instructed contrastingly to enhance the students' communicative capabilities. In addition, it was recommended by the students that the teachers should utilize those strategies that might be useful for enhancing the communicative capability of the students. Concerning the materials of the course, most students declared that the teachers brought the material from actual life situations, whereas the classroom observations uncovered that the teachers seldom supplement the materials by signifying these to the profession. Contrarily, [McDonough & Shaw \(2003\)](#) recommend that the courses should take into account the students' genuine needs. The examination of the data demonstrated that distinctive strategies like tests, quizzes, assignments, and oral presentations should be utilized to evaluate the student's aptitudes. Some of the

students gave suggestions to bring improvement in the assessment criteria of the course. The teachers asserted that most of the time they assessed students by assigning them writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills tests. The strategy which the teachers embraced for the evaluation appears to be most useful for enhancing the aptitudes of the students, however giving opportune responses to the students could be a good point in enhancing the students' skills. The lack of utilizing new teaching methods like the use of multimedia, movies, audio-visual aids, recording, presentation, unattractive material, and repetition of material made the course unwelcoming for the students. Therefore, it is suggested that the course needs practical material in the form of tasks and activities, presentations, and class discussions to create interest among the students and the repetition of the material should be finished and details of a topic with product-oriented activities should be included to create interest of the students in learning language skills. It was observed that most students take the course tranquil, and uncomplicated, and did not display ample enthusiasm for it as they appeared amid specialized courses. Similarly, [McDonough & Shaw \(2003\)](#) suggest that a course ought to build up enthusiasm among the students, and their needs ought to be considered in the courses. Likewise, [Munby \(1978\)](#) suggests that it is mandatory to incorporate activities in the courses that assist the students in specialized workplaces. That is the reason, it is purposed that the Compulsory English course ought to enhance all four language skills of the students, the course contents should be appropriate and focuses on hands-on activities of daily life. [Nunan \(1988\)](#) proposes that the course should include such activities that encourage the students to effective language learning. But the practical application of the course needs more time, therefore the period of the course ought to be expanded for better

learning and application of the material. In brief, the English Compulsory course is good as it helps the students in enhancing language skills but due to some problems which the students face, the course is not very effective in enhancing language skills. If the above suggestions are taken into account and the course keeps in view the students' needs and problems, the course could be proved fruitful for the students in enhancing their language skills.

Conclusion

The findings showed that Compulsory English courses provided a base for students. The principal goal of this course was to enhance students' language skills to enable them to communicate in English effectively. It was discovered that students had encountered many difficulties in enhancing language skills. Because of the lack of proper instructional material like the use of different audio-visual aids, multimedia, projectors, movies, recordings, and language labs, they faced problems in communication and expression viewpoints. The English instructors stated that they are not provided with specified aims and objectives of the course and they are not authorized to shape the content and materials of the course which create hindrance in teaching learning process. The teachers highlight that a short period of four semesters is not sufficient for the enhancement of all four language skills among those students who are not active or responsive in the class. Therefore, the duration of the course should be extended from four semesters to five or six semesters to facilitate the students and the teachers in effective teaching and learning of English language skills. The students and the teachers also propose that it is mandatory to incorporate practical activities that facilitate the students to understand and grasp the learned material by practicing it in real situations which also helps to develop the confidence of the students. As a result, the respondents of the study communicated

some amendments in the course in terms of instructional material, and duration and by considering the needs of the students. This kind of research would allow other researchers to obtain an insight into the actual scenario of teaching and learning processes in detail.

Recommendations

By keeping in view, the results, and the discussion of the study, it was discovered that the Compulsory English course required the following changes in the present course to improve the use of the current prospects. The findings suggest that the course ought to be designed by keeping in view the needs of the students. It should be the responsibility of the course and syllabus designers to conduct a need analysis to deduce the necessities of the students in the current and future situations. The course ought to be planned in a way that provides the integration of all the skills at a time. The course books to be utilized in the Compulsory English course ought to incorporate comprehensive descriptions and different activities; description and practice-rich books ought to be designed. It is recommended that in accumulation to goals or aims, the educational objectives for teaching every language skill in the Compulsory English course ought to be stipulated in detail and organized by the authorities. The time duration which is allocated for the Compulsory English course should be increased from four semesters to five or six semesters so that the skills may be dealt with efficiently and in an integrated way. In other words, 'practice-based instruction', in which practice and production are the heart of the teaching, is included in the Compulsory English course.

The limitation of this study is that the outcomes could apply to the selected institution and its affiliated institutions only. The further limitations include the participants' competence, limited sample size, and the techniques used for data collection. Therefore, it is suggested that further

research could be conducted on different ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses in different contexts, using different samples, and by keeping in view the learner's needs and productive outcomes which will enable them to practice the taught material in real life scenarios to become a productive person of society. Due to the limited sample size, the use of particular institutions, and the presumption that English language learners had the same issues and received the same instructions, it's possible that the results cannot be applied generally. Taking into consideration the learners' needs and productive outcomes could make the teaching-learning process more fruitful for instructors and learners. The findings of this study are significant for institutions, policymakers, ESP course designers, and instructors in different circumstances.

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