

ACADEMIC STRESS OF STUDENTS –IN- TRANSITION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: ANY RELATIONSHIP WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, SELF-ESTEEM AND STUDY HABIT?

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Abstract

An outstanding achievement is the expectation of the present world. For students transiting from secondary school into the university, conformity to university values, culture and traditions, adjustment to the new methodology of instruction, academic pursuits, limited social and personal time in the university environment have prone them to academic stress. Academic stress has been noted to have several negative effects not only on the academic performance of the university students but also on their well-being. This study investigated emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit as factors predicting academic stress of students–in-transition in Nigerian universities. The population of the study comprised of all students-in-transition in University of Benin (Edo state), Kogi State University (Kogi state) and Lagos State University (Lagos state). A total sample of 102 males and 153 females (255 subjects) in year one between 16 and 21 years from the three selected Nigerian universities participated in the study. Descriptive research design of correlation type was used in the study. Data were collected through four standardized scales which were self-administered and was randomly distributed to students-in-transition in their various universities. Data obtained were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression analysis. Three research Questions were raised and answered in the study. The result showed that academic stress of students-in-transition in university was significantly correlated with emotional intelligence ($r = .813; p < .05$), self-esteem ($r = .713; p < .05$) and study habit ($r = .601; p < .05$), independent variables (emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit) when combined together have significant effect on the students-in-transition academic stress ($R = .814$ & $R^2 = .766$) which means that the independent variables accounted for 76.7% in the prediction of student-in-transition in university academic stress and each of the independent variables made significant contribution to the prediction of academic stress. In terms of magnitude of contribution, self-esteem made the most significant contribution ($Beta = .761; t = 11.256; p < 0.05$) to the prediction. Other variables made significant contributions in the following order: emotional intelligence ($Beta = .273; t = 3.283; p < 0.05$) and study habit ($Beta = .134; t = 2.335; p < 0.05$). Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended that seminar and training that would boost self-esteem and emotional competence of students transiting from secondary school to university should be organized.

Keywords: Academic stress, Students-in-Transition in University, Self-esteem, Study habit and Emotional intelligence.

Introduction

Every individual in any part of the world is vulnerable to an unavoidable disorder termed as stress. This is a natural consequence of daily intense competition and hassles among people and thus, threatens human at all stages of life. It is not so uncommon to hear many university

students said "I am stressed". University environment is characterized by competitive events and daily academic hassles such as attending classes, getting assignment done, preparing for test and examination, getting accommodation, meeting course work deadlines, searching for additional course materials, competing with class mates, and other social responsibilities. Coincidentally, majority of the students transiting from secondary school to university are adolescents. Adolescence is one of the major transitions in life from dependency to independency accompanied with "storm and stress". It is a sensitive period associated with changes such as puberty, social integrity, challenges of new roles such as future adulthood related roles, conflict with peers and family which often leads to trivial stress in them.

Bataineh (2013) asserts that university students face an increased risk of experiencing stress. Sinha, Sharma, and Nepal (2001) estimated that 10% to 30% of students experience academic related stress that affects their academic performance. Kumaraswamy (2012) noted that in any research survey report on university students at any given time there will be 10 to 20 % of student population suffering from psychological problems (such as stress, anxiety & depression), muscular tension, inability to concentrate and a variety of physiological reactions. Park and Hah (2007) reported that 23.2% of the university students had depression resulting from academic stress. Taragar (2009) found that 69.00 %, 15.60 % and 15.40 % of the university students experienced high, moderate and low stress respectively.

Researchers (Ross, Niebling & Heckert, 1999; Misra & McKean, 2000) noted that university students transiting from high schools are more prone to greater academic stress compared to students in other year of study. It has been documented in a survey Of 97,357 university students done by American College Health Association (2006) that 32% of the participants reported academic stress which had resulted in an incomplete, a dropped course or a lower grade. The study concluded that one of the greatest health obstacles to university students' academic performance was academic stress (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001). Moreover, during examination and when examination results are announced academic stress is very high, suicide hotlines in many cities across the country are swamped with calls from students who are contemplating suicide because they could not achieve the good scores expected by their parents (Iyke, 2004).

Stress is the consequence of the inability of an individual to react to either emotional or physical threats appropriately. Malach-Pines and Keinan, (2007) defined stress as the insight of incongruity between environmental burden (stressors) and person's ability to fulfill these demands. Academic stress has been defined as student's interpretation of the present demands, challenges and threats in the academic environment in relation to available personal resources for coping. Misra and McKean (2000) opined that academic stress is a mental distress with respect to some apprehended frustration associated with academic

failure, apprehension of such failure or even an awareness of the possibility of such failure. It is the product of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual.

Academic stress is the consequence of incapability of the individual student to balance between school environment and academic demands. Wilks (2008) asserts that academic stress arises when academic related demands exceed the available resources of the individual student. It is characterized by the feelings of threat in the school environment and doubt of being able to meet the threat. Identified sources of academic-related stress include: fear of falling behind with course work, time pressures, too many assignments, financial worries, concern about academic ability (Busari, 2000); struggling to meet academic standards, time management worries, and concerns over grades (Olpin, 1997); competition with other students, taking notes during lectures, meeting different lecturers for different courses, poor relationships with other students and lecturers (Irek, 2015); excessive assignments, unhealthy competition among class students and fear of failure in educational achievement (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Researchers (Malach-Pines & Keinan, 2007; Agolla & Ongori, 2009.; Agolla, 2009) found symptoms of academic stress to be loss of energy, elevated blood pressure, depressed mood, increase in craving, difficulty in concentrating, impatience, nervousness and strain.

Emotional Intelligence is one of the variables that could influence academic stress among students-in-transition in university. According to Nwadinigwe and Azuka-Obieke (2012), emotional intelligence is perceived as a type of aptitude that involves the ability to monitor one's feelings and that of others, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's feeling and thinking. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote both better emotional and intellectual growth (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). There are four related skills in emotional intelligence: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. Mehrabian (2000) concluded in his study that emotional intelligence predisposes success in people's lives and helps to deal with stress.

Ramesh and Anoj (2013) conducted a research among 200 students who were adolescents between 15 and 21 years. They reported that there is significant correlation between academic stress and emotional intelligence of urban female students. This is an indication that the person having high score on emotional intelligence can deal in a better way with academic stress. Garg and Rastogi (2009) investigated the relationship between academic stress and emotional intelligence among 140 students. The study revealed that a significant relationship exists between academic stress and emotional intelligence. This is because

emotionally intelligent students were found to be resilient to stress which determine their success at personal and professional front. In another study using a total of 600 students, Bharti and Sidana (2012) found that emotional intelligence and academic stress positively correlated. That is, those that are emotionally intelligent could cope in stressful situations.

Dewan (2003) using 769 students found that participants with average academic stress were more emotionally stable as compared to the students having high academic stress. A survey study done by Manhas (2004) on 400 students discovered a high positive correlation between emotional intelligence and stress. Also, Farooq (2003) carried out a research on the effect of emotional intelligence on academic stress of 246 adolescent students. The result of the study revealed that participants with high emotional intelligence show better academic stress than the students with low emotional intelligence. Parker and Pisowski (2005) examined the impact of emotional intelligence on the successful transition from high school to university. Results revealed that academically successful students had significantly higher levels of several different emotional and social competencies. This finding suggests that emotional intelligence influences successful transition from high school to university.

Another moderating variable in the study is self-esteem which could be referred to as how an individual think about him/herself, how he/she value him/herself. Self- esteem is the rate of validity, approval, acceptance and worthiness that a person feels about self (Park, Bae & Jung, 2002). According to Inam, Shireen and Haider (2011), self-esteem is the key driving factor that can perk up students' academic performance significantly. Self-esteem is among various personal beliefs that are crucial when it comes to the evaluation of environmental demands. An individual evaluation of the external demands may be observed as either "threat" or a "challenge." However, those with high stress consider these demands as threats while those with high self-esteem beliefs evaluate these demands as a challenge (Zahra, 2010). Hence, whenever one's self-esteem is low; it could leave some psychological effects on the individual that eventually render the individual vulnerable to stressful situations.

A study carried out by Taragar (2009) with 538 students found a significant but weak relationship between academic stress and self-esteem. A correlation study on academic stress and self-esteem among higher students in selected schools of Udupi district conducted by Nikitha, Jose and Valsaraj (2014) with 96 first year students found a significant negative relationship between academic stress and self-esteem. Thombs (2000) discovered that first-year university students transiting from high school with relatively low self-esteem exhibit many problem behaviours such as alcohol problems, poor time management, poor study habits, and self-defeating behaviour than those with higher self-esteem. Also, Taylor and Brown (1999) found level of self-esteem to be directly related to seeking social support, physical health and adjustment to college. In their study, those with high self-esteem were

able to adjust to college life. University students with a low self-esteem tend to be unhappy, less sociable, more likely to use drugs and alcohol, and are more vulnerable to depression, which are all correlated with lower academic achievement (Wiggins & Schatz, 1994). Tahir (2010) reported a correlation between academic stress and self-esteem. Certain level of declination was observed in self-esteem judgments of students due to high stress or anxiety. Also, Siavarchi (2001) discovered a positive correlation between the self-esteem and academic stress.

Study habit which is the strategies and methods of purposeful learning, usually centered on reading and writing is the third moderating variable of the study. Study habit is the way of studying whether systematic or unsystematic, efficient or otherwise, the habits that an individual might have formed with respect to his learning activities (Vasanta & Viswanatha, 2015). It is a learned pattern of behaviour that helps students in the acquisition of study skills. Aluja and Blanch (2004) noted that effective study skills are essential for students to acquire good grades in school and are useful in general to improve learning throughout one's life. Study habits include skills that enable a learner to systematically plan, access, record, organize, encode, and use information on their own in order to achieve a certain goal (Dodge, 1994). Moreover, post secondary learners are expected to possess independent skills that would enable them to accomplish tasks like reading, taking lecture notes and doing assignments on their own.

A study conducted by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (2000) on the relationship between study habit and academic stress revealed that study-habit identified in the areas of note-taking and reading skills influences academic stress. Also, Musch and Broder (2009) investigated the relative contribution of academic stress, self-study and performance in examination. The result of the study indicated that self-study add unique variance in explaining academic stress. Vasanta and Viswanatha (2015), found that academic stress, mental health, study habit are significantly related to academic achievement. Misra and McKean (2000) conducted a study among 249 college students at a Midwestern university. The finding of the study showed that anxiety, ineffective time management and a lack of satisfying activities outside of academia were strong predictors of academic stress. The study also reported that female students managed their time more effectively than male students but they also experienced the highest level of stress and anxiety.

This study is anchored on Person–Environment fit (P–E fit) stress model by Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson (2005). One model that is valuable for understanding academic stress among university students is the Person-Environment Model (Misra & McKean, 2000). The model distinguished the perceived match between the student and the university environment into two types. The first type of P-E fit theory is between the demands of the

university environment and the student's abilities, skills and knowledge to perform excellently in their course of study (referred to as the demand-ability dimension of P-E fit). The second type of P-E fit theory propounded is between student internal needs and values and the extent to which the university environment is able to meet these needs and values (referred to as the supply-need or supply-motive dimension of P-E fit). A misfit, known as underload, exists if the student abilities exceed the university demands while a misfit known as overload, results if the university demands exceeds the student abilities (Guan, Deng, Risavy, Bond, & Li, 2010).

Justification of the Study

Students transiting from secondary school into the university are more prone to academic stress due to conformity to university values, culture and traditions, adjustment to the new methodology of instruction, academic pursuits, and limited social and personal time in the university environment. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) opined that during the first year of university, students experience high level of stress which leads to lower level of overall adjustment and could make the students more susceptible to many social and psychological problems, thus leading to a lower grade point average (GPA) in the final year of study. Also, it could be that most of the behavioural problems which university students elicit such as excessive alcohol intake, cannabis-use and internet usage serves as coping mechanism and relieve from the academic stress which they are passing through.

Consequent on the researcher's experience as former university student, the close interaction had with students-in-transition in university during the teaching learning process and the reported statistics of university students suffering from academic stress and its consequences. There is an urgent need to draw the attention of government, policy makers, university officials, students and parents to academic stress and its predictors among Nigerian university students. An understanding of the relationship among emotional intelligence, self-esteem, study habit and academic stress needed to be gained as efforts to reduce academic-related stress before it becomes a pandemic in the academic world. The finding of the study should assist counselling, developmental and clinical psychologists, social workers and health providers to develop psychological interventions in managing academic-related stress among university students. Moreover, the study is to create awareness to the general public about the existence of academic stress among students-in-transition in Nigerian universities.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship among emotional intelligence, self-esteem, study habit and academic stress of students-in-transition in three Nigerian universities. Specifically, the research proffered answers to the following research questions:

1. What pattern of relationship exists among emotional intelligence, self-esteem, study habit and academic stress of students-in-transition in university?
2. How does emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit jointly account for academic stress of students-in-transition in university?
3. What is the relative contribution of emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit of academic stress among students-in-transition in university?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design of ex-post-facto type. This approach does not involve the manipulation of variables in the study.

Population

The population comprised of all students-in-transition in university from the three selected Nigerian universities. Basically, the participants are undergraduates from University of Benin (Edo state), Kogi State University (Kogi) and Lagos State University (Lagos). The three universities are located in three different states in Nigeria: Kogi, Lagos and Edo states.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for this study consists of three hundred university students transiting from secondary school from University of Benin (Edo state), Kogi State University (Kogi state) and Lagos State University (Lagos state) but two hundred and fifty-five eventually participated in the study. Simple random sampling was used to select one university each from the three states selected for the study namely; University of Benin (Edo state), Kogi State University (Kogi state) and Lagos State University (Lagos state). For convenience, the researchers employed the purposive sampling technique to select 100 participants from each of the three selected universities. Three hundred students in year one were selected to participate in the study but twenty-eight questionnaires were not properly filled and seventeen questionnaires were missing. 102 males and 153 females between 16 and 21 years participated in the study. Their mean age is 18.5 years.

Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher obtained approval from the authorities of the three universities used for the study through the students' affairs office. After this, the researcher and two trained research assistants went round to different faculties and department and entered lecture halls where year one students were less busy. The purpose of the research and how to complete the instruments was explained to the students. They were told that the research is mainly for those transiting from secondary school to university (That is, newly admitted university students) and therefore those students repeating year one were excluded from the study. In

each of the universities, the administration and collection of instruments were done on the same day. Out of three hundred (300) questionnaires distributed, 255 were duly completed and returned. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data and significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Measures

Student-Life Stress Inventory

Student-Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) by Gadzella (1991) was used to measure academic stress of the participants. The inventory originally contains 51 items in a 5-point Likert type response format ranging from 1 _ never to 5 _ most of the time but was adapted to twenty-five items for the purpose of this study. The SLSI measures academic stressors and reactions to stressors (Gadzella, 1991). Items are summed for each subscale to obtain a total score, with higher scores indicative of greater academic stress and reactions to stress, respectively. Items consist of statements such as "I have experienced frustrations due to delays in reaching my goal." The reliability coefficient Cronbach alpha was found to be .79 after test-retest.

Brief Self-Esteem Inventory

Brief Self-Esteem Inventory was developed by Williams (2000). It was used in this study to measure the self-esteem of the participants and it consists of 20 items. In responding to the inventory, the participants have options, which are: "if you feel definitely yes or almost always, if you feel probably yes or often, if you feel probably not or seldom, if you feel definitely not or almost never". The inventory convergent validity was found to be .77.

Emotional Intelligence Test

The emotional intelligence test (EQT) was developed by Akinboye (2006). It has ten Test but Test two was used for the purpose of this research work. The EQ Test two consists of 20 test items with a response format ranging from ; Not true of me at all =1, Not true of me =2, Somewhat true of me =3, Mostly true of me =4 and Very true of me =5. After being pilot tested, it has split-half reliability of 0.81 and 0.89 using the Guttman analytical method.

Study Habit Schedule

Study Habit Schedule (SHS) was developed by Kadapatti and Vijayalaxmi (2012). The schedule has twenty-nine items with both positive and negative statements covering five areas which are: planning of work, notes-taking, revision, preparation for examination, hours of study. The response format is on a three point scale namely: "always", "sometimes" and "never" with scores of 5/3/1 given respectively for the statement. The reliability of the scale established through Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was 0.79.

Method of Data Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to establish the relationship

between the variables. Multiple regressions were also used to establish the joint and relative contribution of independents variables to the prediction of the dependent variable.

Results

Research Question One: What is the relationship that exists among independent variables (emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit) and dependent variable (academic stress) of students- in- transition in university?

Table 1: Correlation Matrix showing relationship among emotional intelligence, self-esteem, study habit and academic stress of students- in- transition in university. (N=255)

Variables	1	2	3	4	Remark
Academic stress	1.00				
Emotional Intelligence	.813**	1.00			S
Self-esteem	.713**	.614	1.00		S
Study Habit	.601**	.513	.851*	1.00	S
Mean	55.54	31.44	28.94	17.54	
Standard Deviation	29.37	17.50	11.63	8.37	

** **Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) Key: S= Significant NS= Not significant**

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics and inter-correlations among the study variables. As shown in the table 1, academic stress of students-in-transition in university was significantly correlated with emotional intelligence ($r = .813$; $p < .05$), self-esteem ($r = .713$; $p < .05$) and study habit ($r = .601$; $p < .05$). There were also significant correlations among the independent variables.

Research Question Two: How does emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit have joint effect on academic stress of students-in-transition in university?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis on Academic stress Of Students-in- Transition

Multiple R ₂ (adjusted)=.814				
Multiple R ² (adjusted)=.767				
Standard error of estimate = 15.78				
Analysis of variance				
	Sum of square (SS)	DF	Mean square	F
Regression	154792.03	3	51597.34	327.83
Residual	39504.97	251	157.39	
Total	189297.00	254		

Table 2 indicates that the independent variables (emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study-habit) when combined together have significant effect on academic stress of students-in-transition in university. The value of R (adjusted) =.814 and R^2 (adjusted) =.766. The analysis of variance performed on the multiple regressions yielded an F- ratio value of 327.83 and was found to be significant at 0.05 level. The independent accounted for 76.7% in the prediction of academic stress of students-in-transition in university while other variables not in the study accounted for the remaining 23.3%.

Research Question Three: What is the relative effect of independent variables (emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit) and academic stress of students-in-transition in university?

Table 3: Relative Contribution of Independent Variables to the Prediction of Academic Stress of Students –in Transition in University

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		T	P
	B	Standard error	Beta			
Constant	13.950	1.567			8.902	P<0.05
Emotional Intelligence	.492	.150	.273		3.283	P<0.05
Self- esteem	.899	.080	.761		11.256	P<0.05
Study habit	.270	.116	.134		2.335	P<0.05

The table 3 shows that each of the independent variables made a significant contribution to the prediction of academic stress of students –in transition in university. In term of magnitude of contribution, self-esteem made the most significant contribution (Beta= .761; t= 11.256; $p<0.05$) to the prediction. Other variables made significant contributions in the following order: emotional intelligence (Beta= .273; t= 3.283; $p<0.05$) and study habit (Beta= .134; t= 2.335; $p<0.05$).

Discussion

The result in table1 was used to answer research question one. From table 1 academic stress of students-in-transition in university significantly correlated with emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit. This corroborates the findings of Dewan (2003) who found that students with average academic stress were more emotionally stable as compared to the students having high academic stress. Garg and Rastogi (2009) discovered a relationship between academic stress and emotional intelligence. This is because emotionally intelligent students were found to be resilient to stress which determine their success at personal and

professional front. Also, Bharti and Sidana (2012) found that emotional intelligence and academic stress was positively correlated. That is, those that are emotionally intelligent could cope in stressful situations. Tahir (2010) reported a correlation between stress and self-esteem as the participants in his study observed certain levels of declination in self-esteem judgments due to high stress or anxiety. Also, Ramesh and Anoj (2013) concluded that there is significant correlation between academic stress and emotional intelligence of urban female adolescents. This is an indication that the person having high score on emotional intelligence can deal in a better way with academic stress. In a survey done by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (2000) on the relationship between study habit and academic stress, the findings in the study revealed that study habit identified in the areas of note-taking and reading skills influence students' academic stress. The multiple regression analysis led to the identification of eight specific study behaviours that predict levels of academic stress.

The result in research question two showed that the independent variables (emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study-habit) when pulled together have significant influence on academic stress of students –in transition in university. Table 2 revealed that the independent variables accounted for 76.7% in the prediction of students-in-transition academic stress while other variables not included in this study accounted for the remaining 23.3%. This finding was consistent with that of Farooq (2003) who discovered that students with high emotional intelligence indicated low academic stress than the students with low emotional intelligence. Mehrabian (2000) concluded in his study that emotional intelligence predisposes success in people's lives and helps to deal with stress. Sheikh (2010) discovered a correlation between self-esteem and academic stress among students. Zahra (2010) submitted that those with high stress consider academic demands as threats while those with high self-esteem beliefs evaluate these demands as a challenge. Hence, whenever one's self-esteem is low; it could leave some psychological effects on the individual that eventually render the individual vulnerable to stressful situations. Vasanta and Viswanatha (2015), found that academic stress, mental health, study habit are significantly related to academic achievement.

Research Question three examined the relative contribution of each of the independent variables to the prediction of academic stress of students –in transition in university. In terms of magnitude of contribution, self-esteem made the most significant contribution to the prediction. Other variables made significant contributions in the following order: emotional intelligence and study habit. This is in line with the results of Siavarchi (2001) which indicated a positive correlation between the self-esteem and academic stress. A study carried out by Taragar (2009) with students found a significant but weak relationship between academic stress and self-esteem. Also, Taylor and Brown (1999) submitted that level of self-esteem is directly related to seeking social support, physical health and adjustment to college. Nikitha,

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Jose and Valsaraj (2014) reported a significant negative relationship between academic stress and self-esteem. Thombs (2000) discovered that first-year college students with relatively low self-esteem exhibit many problem behaviours such as alcohol problems, poor time management, poor study habits, and self-defeating behaviour than those with higher self-esteem. Parker and Pisowski (2005) reported that academically successful students had significantly higher levels of several different emotional and social competencies. Manhas (2004) found a high positive correlation between emotional intelligence and stress. Musch and Broder (2009) discovered that self-study add unique variance in explaining academic stress. Misra and McKean (2000) submitted that anxiety, ineffective time management and a lack of satisfying activities outside of academia were strong predictors of academic stress.

Conclusion

The importance of sound health and well-being of Nigerian youths cannot be overemphasized because of their contributions to the overall advancement and development of the nation. The study discovered that emotional intelligence, self-esteem and study habit have moderating influence on academic stress of students-in-transition in Nigerian universities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Seminar and activities that could boost and enhance emotional competence and self-esteem should be organized for students transiting from secondary school to university.
2. University students should be enlightened on appropriate study skills which could reduce stress and thus enhance their academic performance.
3. Counselling psychologists should develop psychotherapeutic strategies to assist university students in minimizing and coping with academic stress.

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