

## The Teaching Standards and Skills of Higher Education Teachers of Business Studies in Brazil: A study of the Teaching Staff in Public and Private Institutions

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**Abstract:** The general purpose of this study is to understand (from the standpoint of Business Administration teachers in higher education) what is required to have lessons of good quality that provide students with an effective return in terms of learning. A qualitative research methodology was employed which was of an exploratory character and descriptive nature; this involved a bibliographical and documentary analysis, together with in-depth interviews, following the guidelines of a semi-structured study, with twelve teachers who came from both public and private institutions. After the study had been undertaken, it was found that what characterizes a good teacher is that he has a good grounding in didactics and knowledge of the subject being taught. This involves practical work in the classroom with regard to the subject in question, and preferably based on his own professional experience. The teacher should also know how to make use of new technical resources so that classes can allow the students to take part in a more active way. However, it was also clear that a good class does not only depend on the teacher but also on the willingness of the students to learn and the availability of good teaching material. As well as this, it is essential for the academic staff to be supported by the teaching institutions in both the public and private sector.

**Key words:** Standards of higher education; Public and private institutions; Business administration course; Teaching skills

### 1 Introduction

Education in Brazil has been discussed in several areas of knowledge and in different spheres (basic, education, secondary school and higher education). This has given rise to thoughts about both ideal standards and the real standards of education found in the Brazilian educational system. The studies concerning higher education have shown that there are serious *gaps* between the requirements of the market, scientific training and the teaching and institutional activities carried out in the *praxis* (Garonce & Santos, 2012; Gomes & Moraes, 2012; Silva, 2013; Vieira, 2013). As a result, there are losses to the students who seek to have their rights to education ensured and a chance to obtain a better position in the workplace. Globalization and the revolution in information and communications have led to a society that is in constant change and requires changes in the education system as well (Peng *et al.*, 2014). Modern society expects teaching of a high standard with modern methods and not the concept of education described by (Paulo Freire, 1997) as “banking”, in which the teacher leads students to rote memorization of the content they give (Gil, 2009).

Thus, it is important for the teacher to have a solid grounding in the subject that he/she is willing to teach but also, there are other factors that must be taken into account to create a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom. The rapid growth of Teaching Institutions causes a deficiency in the training of these professionals. The structural factors and support for teaching and learning have also been impaired by the contingencies of this new market (large educational groups). They are effects that, in the long term, can lead to the mechanization of teaching and learning, at the expense of critical reflection and production of new knowledge.

For this reason, this article seeks to investigate (from the point of view of teachers involved in Business Administration courses), what is necessary in order to have a quality class, with practical and reflexive techniques that allow emancipation of the student.

### 2 A Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1 Achieving high standards in higher education

The expansion of higher education in Brazil and in other developing countries has shown some

significant numerical indicators (Gomes & Morais, 2012). However, the rise in numbers in terms of places/enrollments does not give an accurate reflection of the quality of the teaching being provided (Carvalho, 2013). There are objections regarding the capacity of the current teaching and learning models to train professionals to have a reflective/critical stance, as a result of a lack of changes in the school curriculum or a change in discourse with regards to a modernized system for practice (activities) (Saraiva, 2011).

In this context, the higher education institutions have effectively turned into business centers, which conceive, produce and advertise education as a *commodity*. This affects the training standards as a whole and has implications for both students and the rest of society (Saraiva, 2011; Carvalho, 2013). The radical change of the educational sector is one of the consequences of globalization, especially in the emerging markets (Carvalho, 2013). It has arisen because of market planning, social networks, new tools for teaching and learning and the effects of these changes on patterns of human behavior (Castells, 2000; Dowbor, 2001; Freeman, 2005; Simic & Carapic, 2008; Touraine, 2007).

The situation outlined here is embedded in the dual context of theory (thinking) and practice (doing) (Marcelo, 2013; Nassif, Grobril, & Bido, 2007). It concerns new economic paradigms in teaching and the decentralization of scientific reflection in an immediate practical application (Faria & Figueiredo, 2013). This is in response to the changes in the market and the modern application of knowledge and information in the face of operational requirements (technical know-how) (Silva, 2013).

The central feature of 'doing' (to the detriment of 'knowing') has caused a breakdown in the process of starting a dialogue (the communicative aspect of education) which is the driving-force behind the continuous flow of teaching and learning (Freire, 1981). As a result, the willingness to share knowledge by building bridges between the educator and the learner (the 'I' and the other) is being replaced by operational mechanisms of immediate application, without any critical reflection (doing) (Hermann, 2014). Thus, the modern critic - whether with regard to education for practice (the market) or reflective education (emancipation) - is introduced into the area concerned with questions regarding the quality of higher education and teaching/learning (creativity, appropriation and the use of skills and knowledge) (Carvalho, 2013).

It is worth stressing that the quality of education (or lack of it) is closely bound up with the advent of 'mass' education in educational systems (Gomes & Moraes, 2012). A good deal of harm is caused to teaching standards by giving prominence to mass education systems. What emerges is a species of half-baked training and undue stress on 'content' which leads to the commodification of education and the insertion of commercial character in educational and cultural training (Silva, 2013).

For this reason, in a form that is diametrically opposed to this marketing tendency, the quality of higher education is guided by some intrinsic and extrinsic features with regard to the role of the teacher (Garonce & Santos, 2012). However, the quality of teaching can only be revealed by bringing together a set of activities, resources and actors involved. The essential requirements of a school (material resources, technologies, physical conditions and people), the technical domain (theory and practice), the pedagogical scope and environmental areas of interaction (real, virtual, internal or external), are the key features for the development and acquisition of new kinds of knowledge (Nogueira & Bastos, 2012).

According to the MEC (Ministry of Education), the government body responsible for education in the country, the minimum standards of quality are the variety and minimum amounts of essential inputs to the development of the teaching-learning process. This body defines the twelve principles that should be the foundation of education, one of them being the assurance of standard of quality. (Lorenzo and Knop, 2011) understand that to measure the quality of higher education, assessment processes are necessary, such as the one introduced in the 1990s, known as Provão, replaced in 2004 by ENADE (Examination of National Students Performance), with the purpose of measuring the knowledge given to students during their graduation.

(Mainardes and Domingues, 2013) in a survey conducted in Brazil in the IES of Joinville-SC, spoke about the key attributes of the Administration graduation courses which contribute the most for the course to be considered of high quality by students. According to the authors, the environment where the course happens, the quality of disciplines, the learning incentive and student engagement are the elements that define the perception of quality of the Administration course by students.

Some authors like Garance and Santos (2012) and Magalhães, Oliveira and Duarte (2014), claim that the role the teacher plays in the classroom is still regarded as one of the only factors important to have a good higher education. However, it is necessary to categorize the systemic concepts of quality in higher education. The poor working conditions of the teaching staff and the institutional constraints in the availability of physical, technical and didactic resources, among other factors, have caused the

teacher to play the role of an antagonist to ensure success or be regarded as the protagonist who is responsible for the school failings in higher education (Rodriguez, 2008).

It should be stressed that there has been a complete swing of the pendulum from the paradigm of coercion (the authority of the teacher) to the paradigm of the democratized environment with participation in teaching and learning (by companies, the family, society, class institutions and so on) (Fortaleza, 2007). This analysis simulates efficiency through integration of the different parts and the dialogue between the academic world and other institutional players in their particular social sector. By itself, it seems to be a transforming force in the academic environment, which acts as a space for plurality, diversity and equitable rights (Hermann, 2014).

However, on a broader field of vision the legitimizing of democratic educational space offers an opportunity to give flexibility to teaching and learning in the most rudimentary areas of knowledge. This meets the demands of economic groups focused on education or diploma marketization, without any teaching or learning (which are certifiers of knowledge) (Carvalho, 2013).

This implies that the teacher has a unique responsibility for teaching and learning standards. As a result, the following points can be confirmed: a) a dialogic process based on ethical principles for the creation of a shared world (between the teacher and learner) (Hermann, 2014), b) a sense of enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the teacher to carry out more complex teaching activities (Fortaleza, 2007), c) the instrumental and technological interface in the support for what is known and for what still has to be found (Marcelo, 2013) the attitudes, didactics, relationships, knowledge and experience the teacher manages to transmit to students (Kühl, Maçaneiro, Cunha, & Cunha, 2013; Veres, Hetesi, & Vilmanyi, 2009), e) also, the media scene which is incorporated in the teaching/learning process (Garonce & Santos, 2012).

However, as mentioned earlier, we should stress the fact that the quality of teaching and learning are supported by a set of institutional, political and economical factors (that go beyond teaching responsibilities), that need to be taken into account when addressing the question of standards in higher education. For Lorenzo and Knop (2011), the quality perceived by the student is related to tangible factors such as library, computer lab, the physical structure of the IES and its appearance. Another factor is the reliability of the preparation to the job market and their involvement in the class. It is important to note that quality is related to the expectations of the student in relation to the institution and teaching. In this regard, the pedagogical teaching resources (Gomes & Moraes, 2012), the policies of concession of vacancies in higher education courses and new forms of marketing of education are evident (Carvalho, 2013).

Hence, when seeking to assess the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, we find that these challenges are related to teaching skills and the quality of the class. This problem is connected to its means and ends by links that isolated produce fragmented results. Attention should be drawn to the theoretical notes that signal that there is a set of ordered activities in every area which are designed to render educational services that can improve the quality of higher education. Moreover, it should be underlined that this is not the abolition of the responsibilities of the teacher, but the finding of the full completeness of all players that are involved in the educational process of quality.

## **2.2 Teaching skills**

The concepts of skills and abilities are recurrent both in the professional and educational fields (Viera, 2013). The complexity and demands of the business market, linked with globalization, brings out the need to focus on professional skills to obtain a competitive advantage. In this sense, there has been a narrowing of the relationship between knowledge and learning as new factors in the preparation of professionals that are suited to this historic period. In this context, a semantic kinship relation can be inferred between the words *competence* and *competition*, which derive etymologically from the Latin *competere*, which means that when someone wins, another person loses, when they are linked to each other. However, this relationship is the opposite when we are dealing with knowledge because the person who teaches has nothing to lose but on the contrary, renews their knowledge. The words *to compete* and *competence* need to be broadened in the university campuses to “seek with”, by endowing the teacher with a pivotal role in the training of qualified and competent professionals (Nassif, Hanashiro & Torres, 2010).

However, what are the attributes that can describe a competent teacher? By describing the strategies needed for the training of teachers, Nassif, Hanashiro and Torres (2010), recommend that the teacher should display the characteristics of an entrepreneur by being flexible with regard to changes and accepting innovations in an investigative and critical spirit, with a capacity to contextualize the reality of the studied situation so that the knowledge can be conveyed. In the view of Viera (2013), the

teacher needs to have the qualities that are analogous to those of a corporate body and be able to work in a team to carry out interdisciplinary projects. This entails having responsibility and autonomy and being able to handle the pupils in an organized way by making use of differentiated and reflexive kinds of pedagogical practices. It also requires making use of technology, ensuring the involvement of students, encouraging them to learn and awakening the desire to conduct research, which requires them to manage the continuous learning process. Perrenoud (2000) categorizes 10 essential teaching skills for each chapter of his book: a) organizing and supervising learning situations; b) following the progress made by the learners; c) conceiving and creating devices for differentiating instructions; d) involving the students in their learning and class work; e) working in teams; f) taking part in the school administration; g) keeping parents informed and involving them in the life of the school; h) making use of new kinds of technology; i) carrying out responsibilities and facing up to the ethical dilemmas that arise in the profession and j) administering their own continuous education.

The need for continuous updating can be put into effect by the use of new kinds of technology for teaching, producing more teaching material in every area and overcoming the problem of a lack of empirical experience on the part of the students of Business Administration. This way, the use of current case studies must be linked to practices that can create discussion among groups of students and ensure interaction in the classroom (Sobrinho, Pinto, & Disidério, 2014).

However, broadening the range of the subjects and discussion is not always desirable for the students unless they are aware that the teacher is knowledgeable and able to convey what he/she knows (Sobrinho, Pinto, & Disidério, 2014; Viera, 2013). The knowledge of the teacher is put to test by the pupils who have a wide range of technological apparatus available to hold the teacher to account. In is here that the competence required by the teacher plays a role, as it involves his capacity to find matters of interest that can attract the students (Sobrinho, Pinto & Disidério, 2014).

Magalhães and Patrus (2013) state that there is no single way of characterizing what a good teacher is but rather, there are different types of good teachers that fit different student profiles. Despite this, the authors have attempted to characterize Business Administration teachers by providing a summarized model with three dimensions. Two of these dimensions are adapted here, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1 Dimensions and Categories for Analyzing What Constitutes a Good Teacher**

Dimensions	Categories
1) <b>Training</b>	a) Academic training; b) Knowledge and c) Experience
2) <b>Didactics and Personality</b>	a) Planning; b) Execution; c) Teaching strategies; d) Assessment techniques and e) Relationship with the students

Source: drawn up by the authors on the basis of Magalhães & Patrus (2013)

It should be stressed that Table 1 only shows the dimensions that depend on the teacher but in practice, we know that the question of whether or not one is regarded as a good teacher also depends on a number of external factors. These include the availability of suitable educational resources, technical support, training in the use of new forms of technology in the classroom and the way the course coordinators and managers of higher education institutions view the students and their complaints regarding teachers. Some teaching institutions regard their pupils as clients in which everything is possible if they complain, whereas others believe that the students are both clients and a product too, since the students educated in the school will pass on their opinions outside the school, if they think they have not been taught in an appropriate way. This risks affecting the reputation of the school and hence influencing the standards of new students who will seek to enroll in courses in the future (Carvalho, 2013).

(To Viera, 2013), Nassif, (Hanashiro and Torre, 2010), interdisciplinarity is an essential feature of teaching as a result of globalization and the combining of common areas, which ensures that knowledge can be integrated in the interests of research. If knowledge is consolidated rather than being broken up into separate subjects, students will have greater independence and will be able to reflect on empirical questions in general terms, by broadening their critical awareness of events and adapting their learning to their personal experiences (Nassif, Hanashiro, & Torres, 2010).

Some universities fail to recognize the value of teaching skills as a competitive differential and

only make an assessment of a teacher's career, their requirements and their ability to convey knowledge, since they are simply concerned with professional qualifications to meet the needs of the job market. But giving a good lesson does not only consist of preparing the students well or having the necessary knowledge or practice and being able to master the subject; competence involves having will and power. A determination to teach combined with the power of transmitting knowledge are the intrinsic features required before a teacher can be regarded as competent (Nassif, Hanashiro, & Torres, 2010; Viera, 2013).

### **3 Methodology**

The general aim of this study is to understand (from the point of view of a teacher of Business Administration courses) what is necessary in order to have a quality class with an effective return in terms of learning for the students. For this work, we decided to conduct a qualitative research with an exploratory character and descriptive nature. This choice of a qualitative approach was due to the wide diversity and plurality involved in the conceptualization of the teaching skills and characteristics of a good class. (Godoi e Balsini, 2010) claim that the qualitative work allows an understanding of the agents involved, not seeking for regularity, but the motivations for their actions. (Creswell, 2014) states that the main purpose of conducting qualitative research is to attempt to understand a particular social situation.

Because of the gaps in the literature on this subject and the need to understand what happens in the classroom in the applied social sciences courses of higher education, the study adopted a descriptive approach (Alves-Mazzotti & Gewandsznajder, 1999). In addition, Triviños (1987, p. 110) states that descriptive studies "[...] aim to deepen the description of a particular reality".

The procedure adopted was to conduct a field research in order to empirically investigate the phenomena in the place of its occurrence and to demarcate the features requiring explanation (Vergara, 2007).

Primary and secondary sources were taken into account for the data collection. The primary data were obtained by means of in-depth interviews with twelve teachers doing a degree course in Business Administration, six of whom attended State universities and six were at private universities. The sample comprised seven women and five men with ages ranging from 29 to 53. They had an average of 14 years working in the area of teaching – two of them had PhDs, nine had a Master's degree and one was doing a Master's degree course. The data collected together with the main people involved were essential for interpreting the phenomenon.

A semi-structured interview schedule was employed to guide the research within the subject in hand and this provided the interviewees with a degree of flexibility in their answers in a way that allowed new questions to be asked and an interpretation to be made of the research findings. Since it entailed conducting research of a qualitative nature, at the outset there was no a priori definition of the exact number of interviews (Godoi & Mattos, 2010). The decision about the interviewees was defined by the criterion of convenience (Gil, 2002; Vergara, 2007).

The interviews were conducted in August and October 2015, and, on average, lasted for 30 to 40 minutes; they were recorded and transcribed. Secondary data were derived from a bibliographical review which involved carrying out a systematic form of research with published material in books and articles which provided the basis for a theoretical/methodological framework for the study (Vergara, 2007). This material led to further questions that underpinned the interviews.

### **4 Results**

According to the results obtained, the majority of the respondents regarded the didactic method of the teacher and his/her knowledge of the subject as being essential requirements to ensure that the lesson flows in a natural way and to hold the students' interest. Another factor considered important and brought up by (Kuhl *et al*, 2013) is the teacher's experience on the topic that is being addressed. Reporting of practical situations, particularly those experienced by the teacher, greatly helps the students in their learning. In addition, all the teachers who were interviewed believe that it is also important for the teacher to know the purpose of the subject being taught and which skills need to be developed in the students. Then, the teacher is able to define the strategies he is going to adopt and what resources are needed to teach each lesson.

Apart from the importance of aligning strategies with the students (through language), there are other key factors needed to ensure a good lesson like: appropriate teaching environment (suitable equipment and facilities, classrooms with reasonable numbers of students, good acoustics and teaching

material of high quality), interface between the different subjects and communication between the teachers, as well as a continuous attempt on the part of the teacher to make improvements in didactic and pedagogical areas. Evidence of this was also shown in other studies such as those of Carvalho (2013), Garonce e Santos (2012), Hermann (2014), Nogueira and Bastos (2012) and Nassif, Hanashihiro and Torres (2010). With regard to the question of behavior, the research found that teachers must be patient, have emotional control, be persuasive, know how to relate with the students and show commitment and enthusiasm. This corresponds to what has already been described by Magalhães and Patrus (2013) and Viera (2013).

In Table 2 we present a summary of what teachers reported in interviews to be the necessary teaching skills for an adequate administration course, their main challenges and difficulties found.

**Table 2 Necessary Skills, Challenges and Main Difficulties for Teachers**

Necessary skills for teachers	Challenges	Main difficulties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Must have domain of the technical knowledge;</li> <li>- Must have good communication;</li> <li>- Must be in continuous update;</li> <li>- Must have commitment with students and institution;</li> <li>- Must have some practical experience regarding the subject they are teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carrying out activities in the classroom that relate theory and practice</li> <li>- Organizing events with professionals</li> <li>- Constantly improve the teaching didactics</li> <li>- Being able to attract students attentions to classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low qualifications of new students</li> <li>- Little investment in technology by educational institutions</li> <li>- Lack of resources for the training of docents</li> <li>- Classes with many students, which makes it difficult to learn (some teachers have reported having more than 70 students per class).</li> </ul>

Source: drawn up by the authors

It is understood that it is in the dialogical process that the teaching activity and learning occurs. As a result, education is a contextualized communication in a specific sense for each subject (student) or group (class). The story of students’ lives, their experiential and relational knowledge are part of the bulk of the students’ skills and teachers must use them to ensure better results in the educational process.

There was the perception of respondents that the combining of resources (human, technological and structural) is essential to achieve good results when teaching business administration degree courses. These resources can allow higher education to expand but require attention with regard to the question of quality since an increase in offer does not necessarily mean maintaining or improving standards.

At the outset of this study, it was expected that there would be different answers from the teachers in public and private institutions. However, apart from the fact that the classrooms in the private sector had more students, it was found that the problems facing the teaching staff were very similar. All of them complained of the following: that the students had failings that were the outcome of their time in primary and secondary school; that the teachers had to put up with behavioral problems in the classroom; that the students were always consulting the Internet or their mobile phones during the lessons and not paying attention to the subjects being taught by the teacher; that the students were unwilling to study outside their scheduled lessons; and that there should be a greater recognition of the value of teaching. Some teachers call this the “Google generation”, as the students believe that everything is available on the Internet and that there is no need to read or pay attention during the lessons. What is clear, as one of the teachers pointed out, is that learning “is a two-way street: the teacher must be good at teaching and the students must be good at learning...”.

All the teachers were unanimous in stating that the new technologies for teaching have an adverse effect (by scattering the students about the classroom), but that they also have a good side: so long as the teachers know how to work with these new teaching platforms, they can make the classes more interesting and encourage the students to be more involved. As one of the teachers interviewed put it:

*“The technology can be an aid or a hindrance. Unless we know how to introduce the technology into the classroom, it can end up causing harm because the students will use it to look at other things like WhatsApp, Facebook,..., but on the other hand, you can use it in the classroom to access material on one’s own cell phone device. You can encourage students to use WhatsApp, including for*

*communicating with the rest of the students in the classroom, but you must set limits, such as having a schedule for when the tool can be used or not ...”.*

At all events, learning to use these new kinds of technology requires time to be spent by the teachers and financial resources. The teaching institutions are not always willing to give support with regard to this or remunerate the staff for the time devoted to preparing lessons or contacting the students through e-mail, etc outside their working hours.

Another point that was noted is that carrying out effective lessons and obtaining the respect of the students does not only depend on the teachers. It also requires basic facilities being available in the institution and support given to the teachers by their superiors in the school hierarchy on matters such as whether or not to attach importance to complaints made by students about a type of lesson, the marks awarded in assessment tests etc. Some teachers stated that it was difficult to give marks that fail students or to require them to read more. This only confirms the dilemmas some of them face: “the teachers feel they are put under pressure not to have high failure rates ...”, “...there is pressure from the institution. If these students begin to fail, they will leave the school and this is in nobody’s interests ...”. In reality, this is a problem that affects some of the private institutions more seriously, because some of the students who are failed switch to other institutions that are competitors in the market. When the school adopts a policy of failing the minimum number of students possible, and said students become aware of this, they tend take advantage of the fact. As Carvalho (2013), and Gomes and Moraes (2012) point out, globalization and mass educational systems impair the quality of teaching.

The public teaching institutions of Brazil are considered the best by students, as they are also the fullest, and they are free. If students decide to go to other private institutions because they have failed in their exams, they will suffer not only in terms of the level of recognition of the diploma but also in financial terms, because they will have to pay for a course in a private institution. The entire set of teachers analyzed said they liked teaching and felt they had a talent for it. This is one of the factors considered important by Magalhães and Petrus (2013) to ensure that a teacher is able to succeed in conveying knowledge. Some of the teachers had previously worked in other professions such as in offices of private companies or consultancies but today are wholly devoted to teaching activities which generally offer a fairly lower salary than what they had earned when carrying out those previous responsibilities.

## **5 Conclusion**

This study has made some notes on the quality of teaching and skills of teaching professionals in the area of Business Administration in Higher Education. The literature addresses issues such as the precarious conditions of teaching, new kinds of technology as magnifiers of teaching activities and the new profile of students, among other factors.

Among this set of features and from the interviews that were conducted, it was clear that didactics and knowledge of the subject are seen as important for the results to be effective in order to stimulate and develop the skills of the students. However, they must be associated with a set of supporting tools, which enhance the results in interactions and improve the quality of teaching activities. In addition, it was clear from the interviews that if the students are unwilling to learn, it is difficult for the teacher to be able to teach effectively. Today, the task of teaching is becoming increasingly more difficult since the students feel tempted to “escape” from the subject of the classes and consult electronic resources, which are easily available. How can a teacher compete with these resources and ensure that their lesson can be more interesting? This is the main challenge of our current world. Some, however, believe that the use of these kinds of technology in lessons can make the students feel more involved and help to achieve better results.

It is a consensus among teachers that the use of new teaching technologies can make classes more dynamic and interesting but at the same time can disrupt the learning process for the students, because it can cause dispersion in class. These new technologies require more time for the teachers to train and also more investment by educational institutions, public or private.

The learning process is a two-way street, as one of the interviewed teachers said, not only the teacher has to be good at teaching, the student also has to be good at learning. In this scenario it is clear that low qualification of students entering the university is one of the main difficulties reported by several teachers. It is recommended that future research projects seek to integrate the attitudes of the teachers and learners and carry out an assessment of the kind of activities that could be of value to each of the categories examined. This could lead to a better understanding of this phenomenon within the

context of interaction.

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