STAFF AND STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE FACILITATION AT THE NOUN: EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper reports the expectations and experiences of academic staff and students of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)'s online facilitation processes the study employed the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 1596 made up of 1146 Students and 450 NOUN Facilitators. All 1596 respondents were purposively taken as sample size because they were enrolled as NOUN Students and Facilitators in a course during the end of the second semester of 2022. To guide the study, four research questions were raised, while two hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. Data collection was facilitated with the aid of a questionnaire titled: "Staff and Students' Expectations and Experiences of Online Facilitation Questionnaire (SSEEOFQ) (r=0.918, r=0.746 respectively). Findings revealed that NOUN Students have a better understanding of online facilitation and are comfortable with online facilitation. Additionally, findings show that there exist positive expectations and experiences among NOUN students and facilitators. The findings further revealed that there was a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' job status and their online facilitation experiences. It was also found that some NOUN students do not wish to attend online facilitation, despite their positive perception of the process. The study, therefore, recommended that University authorities should endeavour to continuously encourage good practices of better-perceived experiences on online facilitation in NOUN through various improvement activities.

Keywords: *Expectations, Experience, Online facilitation, Academic Staff, Students, perception.*

Introduction

The success of online delivery will be determined largely by the experiences of the students. Unless there is appropriate and adequate student support, success in learning using this online technology mode of instruction will be difficult to achieve. It is therefore essential that

online institutions become aware of the limitations of current services and address the student needs reasonably to make this technology mode of instruction attractive to a wider community of students.

Merriam-Webster (2024) defines "online" as being "connected to, served by, or available through a system, especially a computer or telecommunications system, such as the Internet." This definition emphasizes the fundamental role of digital networks in facilitating interactions, communication, and access to resources. Furthermore, Rouse (2023) in Techopedia notes that "online" pertains to activities or systems that exist on or are accessible via the internet, highlighting their importance in promoting global connectivity and information exchange. Meanwhile, the term 'online learning' is defined as instruction that is conveyed electronically via various multimedia and Internet platforms and applications. It is used interchangeably with other terms such as computer-mediated learning, web-based learning, e-learning, computer-assisted instruction, and Internet-based learning. According to Choudhury and Pattnaik (2020) define online learning as "the transfer of knowledge and skills in a well-designed course content through an electronic media like the Internet." This definition focuses on how online learning utilizes digital frameworks and technologies to deliver structured educational content, emphasizing flexibility, accessibility, and autonomy for learners. Also, Online learning is today considered an effective substitute for traditional classroom education Arghode, Brieger, and Wang,(2018). This brought about the increasing demand for online learning in Higher Education Institutions Ramkis soon, Belle, and Bhurosy, (2020).Online learning could offer great opportunities for students, instructors, institutions, and communities that would not otherwise have been possible.

Meanwhile, online education demands changes within institutions and the provision of various types of support for stakeholders both faculty and students, and the processes to ensure its success. Such as pre-enrolment support services: teaching and learning support services, technical support services: services relating to IT support, providing students with a range of options for accessing assistance, and more. Harper, Hedberg, Bennet, and Lockyer, (2000), The online experience: A review of the state of Australian online education and training practices, NCVER, Adelaide. (2000) recommended the underlisted strategies to help prepare students for online learning: students need to be prepared and supported through the initial stages; not all students make effective use of the opportunities offered; many institutions make assumptions about the resources and access available to students; Students need technical aid when starting to use technology; learning materials need to be of a simple, consistent design; all learning support to be accessible online; materials need to be self-directed and independent; students need access to counseling services and the provision of a mentoring program; and there is a need for suitably qualified staff to assist students with technology and to create resources.

Arguably, the demand for intervention strategies support such as communication strategy between the students and the University, particularly in NOUN has been emphasized to improve the students' expectations and experiences as well as the program completion rate. Nevertheless, recognition of the changes taking place in the teaching and learning model and the skill base requirements of students accepting online delivery, as well as the related issues students face as they make this move in NOUN, from the student and facilitator perspective of what they expect and experience in the form of support for online learning and teaching, there seems to be limited expectation and experiences of the online facilitation process.

However, Staff Expectations of Online Facilitation imply what staff members, such as instructors and facilitators, anticipate from the online facilitation process. This can range from the need for adequate training and technical support to effectively manage online facilitation, to

expectations regarding levels of student engagement, response rates, and interactive participation. Staff also have expectations about workload distribution, time management, and any compensation or incentives associated with online facilitation. Additionally, there are expectations concerning the quality and reliability of digital tools, platforms, and internet connectivity.

Student expectations can be defined as the beliefs that students hold about successfully coping with academic responsibilities Wigfield and Eccles, (2000). Furthermore, expectations also impact student attitudes toward the ways of learning. Students' expectations connote strong hopes or beliefs that something will happen or get something that they want. Similarly, Student Expectations of Online Facilitation focuses on what students expect from the online facilitation process. These expectations may include flexible access to course materials, the ability to engage with content at convenient times, and a desire for timely support from instructors, including feedback and responsiveness. Students also look for a user-friendly online platform that is easy to navigate and accessible on various devices. Furthermore, they desire interactive and collaborative opportunities, such as group discussions and real-time communication.

Nevertheless, Staff Experiences of Online Facilitation refer to the reality of facilitating online learning, which may differ from their initial expectations. These experiences can include the challenges staff face in engaging students online, such as issues with participation, attention, and active learning. Other aspects include the availability and functionality of necessary technology and support systems, the actual workload involved (which may differ from anticipated demands), and opportunities for professional growth through learning new digital facilitation skills. Adjusting teaching methods for an online environment is also a significant consideration.

Moreover, Student Experiences of Online Facilitation focus on their actual interactions with online learning, which may also vary from their initial expectations. This encompasses the ease or difficulty of accessing the online platform, including factors like internet stability and device compatibility. Students may evaluate their levels of interaction with instructors and peers, the engagement quality of the content and delivery methods, and how online facilitation impacts their learning effectiveness, understanding of course material, and overall satisfaction. Additionally, students consider the availability and quality of feedback from instructors and support systems. Conversely, it can be argued that perfect expectations and goals would go a long way in helping provide scaffolding for student academic achievement growth and establishing trust between the facilitators and students. When facilitators make learning aims and expectations explicit to students, students will be better able to meet those expectations. Valle, Regneiro, Rodriguez, Pineiro, Freire, and Ferradas (2015) opined that students have beliefs about their ability and success in meeting academic demands. These beliefs can be impacted by the subjective perception of the value of the academic activity to the student as reiterated in expectancy-value theory.

Conversely, expectations and experiences of higher institution students regarding online learning courses with the motive of achieving maximally during the study could translate into opportunities in the determining way to improve the quality of services rendered to the beneficiary and acceptability of online mode of learning by students in the future. Therefore, faculty support for Online teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized.

The faculty teaching online courses play a crucial role in the success of the courses and student learning Kibaru, (2018). They are integral to all aspects of an online course and to student engagement and success, acting as the subject matter expert, course designer, course manager,

and facilitator Martin, Budhrani, Kumar, and Ritzhaupt (2019). Faculty roles might vary depending on institutional structures and academic policies, effective systems and supports are needed to ensure that they can successfully teach online. To bring about successful teaching and learning, teachers and students need to be clear on the roles they expect from each other.

Statement of the Problem

Students' expectations and experiences of the online facilitation process seem worrisome. Despite the nature of support that students expect during the online learning process such as pre-enrolment support services: teaching and learning support services, technical support services: services relating to IT support, and more. The nature and range of services experienced by online students in the NOUN vary from Facilitator to facilitator. Each facilitator attempts to meet the needs of its students within the constraints of variables in NOUN. It is observed from the student and facilitator's perspective of what they expect and experience in the form of support for online learning and teaching process, Also, it is observed that there seems to be limited expectations and experiences of the online facilitation process. Therefore, it is on this premise it stands to reason to empirically examine *the expectations and experiences of academic staff and students of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)'s online facilitation processes.*

Objective of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the staff and students' expectations and experience of online facilitation at the NOUN: evidence from practice. Specifically, the study determines:

1. the understanding of NOUN students about online facilitation
2. the expectations of NOUN students of Online facilitation
3. NOUN Facilitators' expectations from students in the online facilitation process
4. the relationship between NOUN Students' demographics and their online facilitation experience

Research Questions

1. What is the understanding of NOUN students about online facilitation?
2. What are the expectations of NOUN students of Online facilitation?
3. What are NOUN Facilitators' expectations from students in the online facilitation process?
4. What is the relationship between NOUN Students' demographics and their online facilitation experience?

Research Hypotheses

H^{o} 1: There is no significant relationship between NOUN students' age range and their online facilitation experience.

H^{o}2: There is no significant relationship between NOUN Students' job status and their online facilitation experience.

Methodology

The study used the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was students and facilitators at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. One thousand one hundred and forty-*six (1146) Students and 450 NOUN Facilitators were purposively taken as sample size because they were enrolled as NOUN Students and Facilitators in a course during the end of the second semester of 2022 in* NOUN study centers across six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The study used two online surveys, which is delivered to respondents in the period between the November 2022 End of Semester Evaluation for Learners and; the December 2022

End of Semester Evaluation for Facilitators. The online two surveys were created in Google Forms and sent to the students and facilitators through emails.

A survey questionnaire titled: *"Staff and Students' Expectations and Experiences of Online Facilitation Questionnaire (SSEEOFQ) (r=0.918, r=0.746 respectively)* validated by experts was used for data collection. The survey was designed in a Likert Scale format of 5 response options (5 = Strongly agree to 1 = Strongly disagree) and a dichotomous format (2 = Yes to 1= No). The remarks for the research questions were based on a weighted aggregate mean of 1.5 and 3.0 for each dimension respectively. Thus, the presence of scores above 1.5, and 3.0 points reflect positive student and staff expectations and experiences of online facilitation.

Descriptive statistic of mean was used for data analyses on research questions while the Pearson product-moment correlation statistic was used to determine the relationship between NOUN Students' demographics and their online facilitation experience at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Demographic Data

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	56 - 65 Years	10	.9	.9	.9
	46 - 55 Years	88	7.7	7.7	8.6
	36 - 45 Years	248	21.6	21.6	30.2
	26 -35 Years	526	45.9	45.9	76.1
	16 -25 Years	274	23.9	23.9	100.0
	Total	1146	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 above shows that out of 1146 respondents, 274 of the respondents representing 23.90% are between the age of 16 -25, 526 respondents representing 45.90% are between the age between 26 and 35, 248 of the respondents' equivalents 21.60% are within the age between 36 and 45, 88 respondents representing 7.70% are within the age between 46 and 55, while 10 respondents equivalent to 9.00% are within the age between 56 and 65. This implies that the majority of the student's age is within the age range between 26 and 35 as shown in Table 1.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents by Job Status

Job Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Vali d	Under Employed	54	4.7	4.7	4.7
	Unemployed	168	14.7	14.7	19.4
	Self Employed	305	26.6	26.6	46.0
	Employed	619	54.0	54.0	100.0
	Total	1146	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 above shows the employment status of the students, the Table revealed that most of them are working. 619 representing 54.00% of them are employed, 305 representing 26.60% are self-employed, 168 equivalent to 14.70 % are unemployed, and underemployed 54 equivalents 4.70%. This implies that most NOUN students are busy people which will need a flexible mode of learning.

Research QuestionOne: What is the understanding of NOUN students about online facilitation?

Table 3:Mean, and Standard Deviation on theStudents' understanding of Online Facilitation (N= 1146)

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Are you aware of the Online Facilitation provided by NOUN	1.96	1.39	Positive
2	Do you participate in the online facilitation?	1.76	1.23	Positive
3	Does the type of job you do prevent you for participating in the facilitation?	1.49	0.99	Positive
4	Are your facilitators competent?	1.85	1.30	Positive
5	Do you like the idea of having pre-recorded/Instructional videos	1.93	1.37	Positive
6	Are you comfortable with the current facilitation time?	1.55	1.05	Positive
7	Should the use of online/virtual examination be encouraged?	1.78	1.25	Positive
8	Will you participate in the online facilitation if all the facilitations are held only on weekends?	1.44	0.94	Negative
9	Do you know who to meet when you have a challenge in your learning?	1.81	1.28	Negative
	Aggregate	**1.73**	**1.20**	**Positive**

Note. SD = standard deviation

The data presented in Table 3 reveals the mean and standard deviation of NOUN Students' understanding of online facilitation. The mean responses of all 9 items ranged from 1.44 to 1.96 while the values of the standard deviation ranged from .94 to 1.39 and the aggregate Standard Deviation of 1.20, with the standard deviation of all the measures (questions) being more than one (1), clearly shows that level of understanding falls above the criterion aggregate mean score of 1.5 sets for a high level of understanding and satisfaction. However, item numbers 3 and 8 fell below the required mean of 1.5, which implies that the type of job they do presently have an impact on their participation in online facilitation and *that someNOUN students do not wish to attend online facilitation.* From this, it can be understood that NOUN Students *had a better understanding of online facilitation and are comfortable with the online facilitation process.*

Research Question Two: What are the expectations of NOUN students of Online facilitation?

Table 4:Mean, and Standard Deviation on the students' expectationsand experiences ofonline facilitation (N=1146)

S/N	Item Statements (Expectations)	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	I am proud to be a student at National Open University of Nigeria	4.49	4.02	PE
2	I chose National Open University of Nigeria because of its quality delivery	4.13	3.69	PE
3	The course materials are well written and meets today's employability needs	3.87	3.49	PE
4	The course materials are self-explanatory	3.88	3.49	PE
5	The unit objectives were clearly stated, and they guided my learning	4.203	3.751	PE
6	The self-assessment exercises help in monetary learning process	4.09	3.65	PE
7	The admission process is clear and seamless	4.50	4.03	PE
8	Course registration process is clear and seamless	4.46	3.99	PE
9	Information is adequately disseminated to students to guide their learning	3.64	3.30	PE
10	Students receive adequate technical support	3.36	3.03	PE
11	Students receive adequate social and administrative support when need be	3.45	3.10	PE
12	Students receive prompt feedback on inquiries	3.31	2.99	PE
13	The print course materials are available at the study centres	3.19	2.90	PE
14	The online facilitation in NOUN help improve learning	3.91	3.51	PE
15	The online facilitations are well presented	3.74	3.35	PE
16	The instructional videos help in knowledge mastery	3.88	3.46	PE
17	NOUN provides good learning environment for all including those with special needs	3.76	3.367	PE
18	The student handbook provides adequate guidance to students	3.90	3.48	PE
	Aggregate	**3.88**	**3.48**	PE
19	Students are adequately informed on the courses to register per semester	3.57	3.26	PE
20	Students can track their academic progress from their portals	4.22	3.78	PE
21	Students receive prompt response to TMA and assignment scores	4.06	3.67	PE
22	NOUN supports students' creativity and innovation	3.61	3.23	PE
23	The TMA questions are of good standard	3.72	3.38	PE
24	The examination questions align with the course stated objectives	3.94	3.54	PE
25	The examination questions are clear and understood	3.86	3.48	PE
26	The sitting arrangement in the examination hall do not allow for examination malpractice	4.44	3.98	PE

27	There is clear guideline on the conduct of TMAs and examinations	4.24	3.80	PE
28	The invigilators are fair to all during examination	4.03	3.63	PE
29	There is adequate infrastructure for teaching and learning	3.56	3.21	PE
30	NOUN students have easy access to e-resources and NOUN e-library	4.04	3.64	PE
31	The work schedule of the students affects their active participation in the online facilitation	4.02	3.62	PE
32	Students receive prompt attention from the study centre	3.64	3.29	PE
	Aggregate	**3.93**	**3.53**	**PE**

Note. SD = standard deviation PE = Positive Expectations. PE = Positive Experiences

The result of data presented in Table 4 reveals the mean and standard deviation of NOUN Students' expectations and experiences of online facilitation. The mean responses on Students' expectations and experiences range from 3.19 to 4.50, and 3.56 to 4.44 respectively while the values of the standard deviation ranged from 2.90 to 4.02, and 3.21 to 3.98 respectively, with the aggregate Standard Deviation of 3.48 and 3.51 correspondingly of all the measures (questions) been higher than one (1), clearly shows that Students expectations and experiences fall above the criterion aggregate mean score of 3.00 set for positive expectations and experiences, this implies that the data had widespread. From this, it can be understood that *there exist positive expectations and experiences of online facilitation among NOUN students.*

Research Question Three: What are NOUN Facilitators' expectations from students in the online facilitation process?

Table 5:Mean, and Standard Deviation on the expectations of Facilitators from students in the online facilitation process (N= 450)

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	On the average, did you receive half the number of students assigned to you for facilitation?	1.59	1.08	Positive
2	Was it easy for you to set up the facilitation platform?	1.69	1.18	Positive
3	Is the facilitation platform interactive?	1.73	1.21	Positive
4	Were you sending message via email to direct the students before and after facilitation for the week?	1.67	1.16	Positive
5	Would you recommend continuity of online facilitation?	1.83	1.29	Positive
6	Do you suspect students coping one another or from another source in their project writing?	1.53	1.03	Positive
7	From your assessment, can we say that NOUN students produce quality research?	1.66	1.15	Positive
8	Where your supervisees responding to your corrections and feedbacks in record time?	1.73	1.21	Positive
9	Was the teaching practice assessment guide helpful?	1.83	1.29	Positive
	Aggregate	**1.70**	**1.18**	Positive

The data presented in Table 5 reveals the mean and standard deviation of NOUN Facilitators' expectations from students in the online facilitation process. The mean responses of all 9 items ranged from 1.53 to 1.83 while the values of the standard deviation ranged from 1.03 to 1.29 and the aggregate Standard Deviation of 1.18, with the standard deviation of all the measures (questions) being more than one (1), clearly shows that facilitators expectation falls above the criterion aggregate mean score of 1.5 sets for positive expectation. Thus, therefore implies that *there exist positive expectations among NOUN facilitators* from students in the online facilitation process.

Research Question Four: What is the relationship between NOUN Students' demographics and their online facilitation experience?
Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between NOUN students' age range and their online facilitation experience.

Table 6: Relationship between NOUN Students age range and their online facilitation experience(Pearson product-moment correlation test)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	R	P
Age	1146	3.8429	.90401	.550**	.000
Online Facilitation Experience	1146	128.3412	19.71566		

***** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)***

Correlations

		Age	Onlinef acilitation experience
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.550**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1146	1146
Online Facilitation experience	Pearson Correlation	.550**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1146	1146

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6: shows the result for Pearson product-moment correlation between NOUN Students' age range and their online facilitation experience which was found to be moderate, positive, and statistically significant. The correlation Table indicated that there was a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' age range and their online facilitation experience at a 0.05 level of significance (r =.550**, $p < 0.05$).

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between NOUN Students' job status and their online facilitation experience

Table 7: Relationship between NOUN Students' job status and their online facilitation experience(Pearson product-momentcorrelation test)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	R	P
Job Status	1146	3.2993	.88675	.911**	.000
Online Facilitation Experience	1146	128.3412	19.71566		

***** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).***

Correlations

		JobStatus	Online Experiences
JobStatus	Pearson Correlation	1	.911**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1146	1146
Online Experiences	Pearson Correlation	.911**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1146	1146

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7: shows the result for Pearson product-moment correlation between NOUN Students' Job Status and their online facilitation experience which was found to be strong, positive, and statistically significant. The correlation Table indicated that there was a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' job status and their online facilitation experiences at a 0.05 level of significance (r =.911** $p< 0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

The paper reports the expectations and experiences of academic staff and students of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)'s online facilitation processes. The study's finding revealed that NOUN Students had a better understanding of online facilitation and are comfortable with the online facilitation process and that some NOUN students do not wish to attend online facilitation. All 9 items of the questionnaire used to measure this area revealed a mean score above the benchmark average mean and thus implied that the level of understanding falls above the criterion aggregate mean score of 1.5 sets for a high level of understanding and satisfaction and that some NOUN students do not wish to attend online facilitation as shown in item 8. This finding is in disparity with that of Villa, Litago, and Sánchez-Fdez (2020) who reported that in terms of experience, in the same research, students were not satisfied with virtual education, especially regarding courses assessment. Also, the findings are in disparity with that of Cochrane (2000) who reflected on his 20-year distance learning experience and noted that the Caucus conferencing system was less than satisfactory due to a lack of sufficient training and the reluctance of most students to participate regularly.

The finding further indicated that there exist positive expectations and experiences of online facilitation among NOUN students. All 32 items of the questionnaire used to measure this area show a mean score above the benchmark average mean and thus implied that NOUN Students had positive expectations and experiences of online facilitation during the process. This finding is in agreement with that of Imsa-and, (2020) who reported that students would not repeat this experience due to the absence of interaction with teachers, excess of tasks, and the accelerated pace of learning

The finding in respect of the NOUN Facilitators' expectations from students in the online facilitation process revealed that there exist positive expectations among NOUN facilitators as NOUN students produce quality research. All the 9 items of the questionnaire used

to measure this area show a mean score above the benchmark average mean and thus implied positive expectations from NOUN students. The findings of the study are in agreement with that of Armarego and Roy (2000) who argue that by having students complete reflective journals or some other measure of self-assessment, they have opportunities for reflection and introspection so that they can make sense of the experiences they have gained.

The finding in respect of hypothesis 1 statistically showed that there was a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' age range and their online facilitation experience. This may be a result of the fact that the younger NOUN students are more familiar with online technology. As the correlation Table indicated that there was a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' age range and their online facilitation experience at a 0.05 level of significance ($r = .550^{**}, p < 0.05$).

Equally, the finding in respect of hypothesis 2 statistically revealed that there was a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' job status and their online facilitation experiences. As the correlation Table indicated that there was a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' job status and their online facilitation experiences at a 0.05 level of significance ($r = .911^{**} p < 0.05$).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the study concluded that there exist positive expectations and experiences among NOUN students and facilitators, and further revealed that there was a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' age range and their online facilitation experiences, in addition, there was a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between NOUN Students' job status and their online facilitation experiences. It was also found that some NOUN students do not wish to attend online facilitation, despite their positive perception of the process. However, expectations and experiences of higher institution students regarding online learning courses with the motive of achieving maximally during the study could translate into opportunities in the determining way to improve the quality of services rendered to the beneficiary and acceptability of online mode of learning by students in the future. Therefore, faculty support for Online teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized.

Recommendations

Given the foregoing and the findings from this study, the following recommendations are considered necessary

- University authorities should endeavor to continuously encourage good practices of better-perceived experiences on online facilitation in NOUN through various improvement activities.
- Management and facilitators should strive to develop guidelines for the effective promotion of quality online facilitation.
- Students should be enlightened about the purpose, benefits, and availability of academic facilitator

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