

# ENHANCING CAREGIVER AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN'S READING DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

CASE STUDY 3 - CATCH-UP CLUBS

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## PREPARED BY

The authors of this report are Kathleen Denny, Stephen Richardson, and Laura Galle (Independent Consultants).

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## PHOTO CREDIT

Save the Children

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# CATCH-UP CLUBS



2021 – present



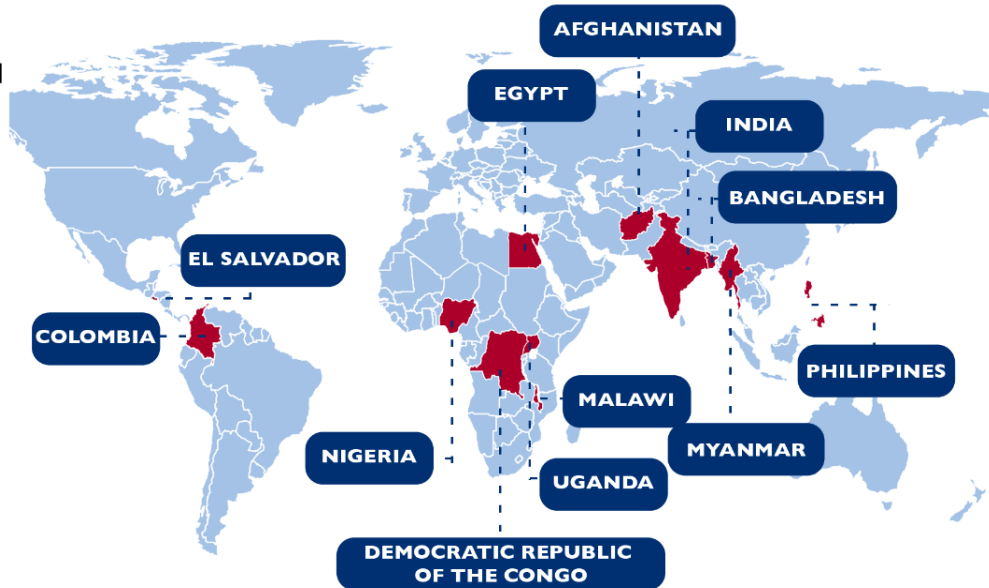
Submitters: Save the Children



Partners: Bangladesh - AINT Bangladesh and SKS Foundation



Global



## INTERVENTION SPACE



Community activities and events

## INTERVENTION



Non-formal education

## EVIDENCE HIGHLIGHTS



Student Learning Outcomes:



In Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Malawi, Myanmar, and Uganda, after spending 50-60 hours in the Catch-up Clubs:



71 percent of children can read at least sentences, including 53 percent of children who can read a Grade 2 level text.



72 percent of children progressed at least two literacy levels.

## ACRONYMS

ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trials
SEL	Social-Emotional Learning
ToT	Training of Trainers

## DEFINITIONS

**LITERACY**—Literacy is a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing, and using numbers throughout life and is part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development, and global citizenship as well as job-specific skills (UNESCO, 2023).

**PROMISING PRACTICE**—A promising practice is a method or approach that has the potential to become a best practice. A best practice has been shown, by research and experience, to produce optimal results and is established or proposed as a standard suitable for widespread adoption (USAID, 2018).

**READING**—Reading is the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Readers can construct meaning from texts in a variety of forms. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment (PIRLS, 2021).

**SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING**—Social-emotional learning is a set of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that children, youth, and adults learn through explicit, active, focused, and sequenced instruction, which allows them to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (USAID, 2021).

**VOLUNTEER**—A volunteer is an individual who provides technical assistance under a program, receiving no direct salary from the assignment. Expenses may be covered by the program (USAID, 2016).

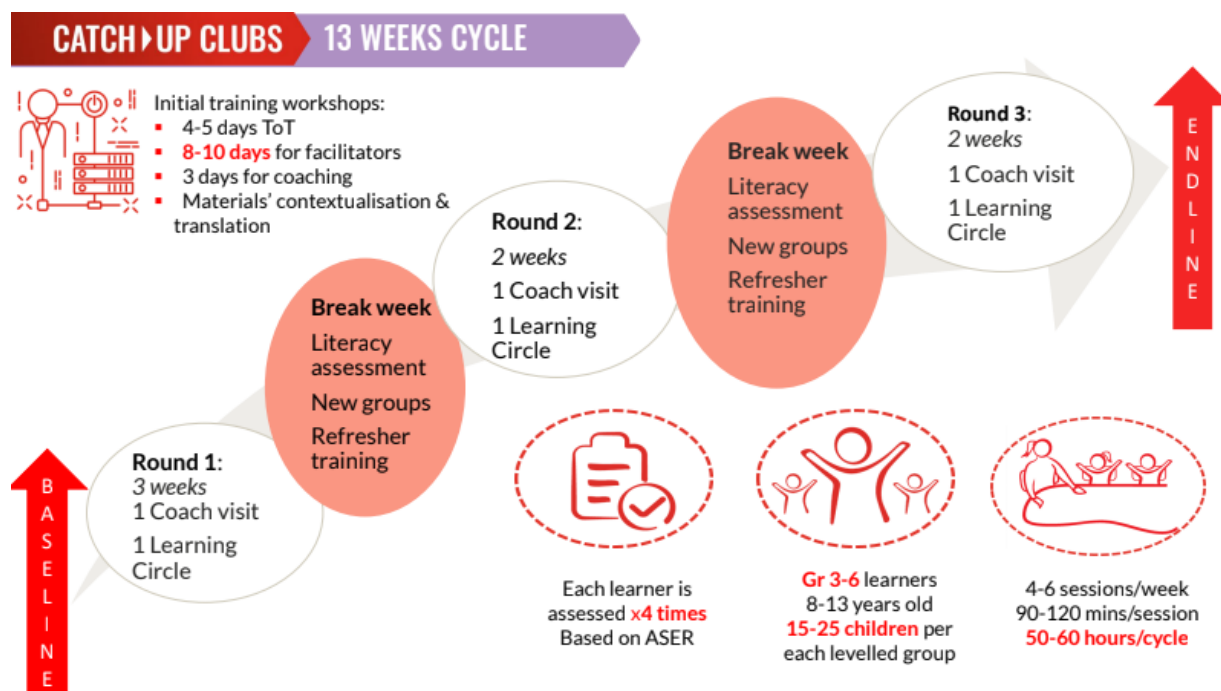
## BACKGROUND

Save the Children designed Catch-Up Clubs as a global approach to provide community-based remedial learning opportunities to academically vulnerable students. The intervention combines evidence-based practices including [Pratham's Teaching At The Right Level](#) and Save the Children's [Literacy Boost](#) and [Numeracy Boost](#) approaches. Save the Children used Catch-Up Clubs to address learning loss in 13 countries where children were out of school for extended periods due to COVID-19, displacement, or migration. Catch-Up Clubs consist of three core interventions:

- Community-based, leveled learning clubs;
- Community-level integrated case management; and
- Cash and voucher assistance for vulnerable households.

Catch-Up Clubs are a volunteer-led approach that target students from Grades 3-6 who need additional support to develop their foundational skills in reading and math as well as social-emotional learning. Staff organize participating students into learning groups using ASER-based (Annual Status of Education Report) early-grade reading and math assessments. This enables students to receive targeted instruction based on their needs rather than their age or grade level. Figure 1 provides an overview of program stages and the support each student receives throughout a 13-week cycle.

FIGURE I: Catch-Up Club Overview (Save the Children)



## PLANNING

Save the Children implements the Catch-Up Club approach in countries where a short-term, rapid solution is needed to support groups of students whose education has been briefly disrupted.<sup>1</sup> In these contexts, students are either in formal school or have the opportunity to transition into the formal school system. In Bangladesh, for example, Save the Children used Catch-Up Clubs to provide remedial support to children when schools reopened after COVID-19 to help them master foundational skills in reading and math that they missed during the pandemic.



Children engage in Catch-Up Club activities at a primary school in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda. Photo credit: Save the Children.

Once the organization identifies Catch-Up Clubs as the appropriate approach for a given context, teams conduct a needs assessment, including the ASER-based assessment, to support the planning and contextualization process. Save the Children typically uses schools and formal education representatives (e.g., principals, teachers, education authorities) as a point of entry to communities for needs assessment activities.

Identifying the best volunteer model for the context is one of the most important factors to consider when establishing Catch-Up Clubs within a country program. Country teams typically coordinate with local education authorities, community leaders, and organizations to identify volunteers within the community who can facilitate Catch-Up Club activities. Below are examples of volunteer models from several participating countries.

TABLE I: Catch-Up Club Volunteer Models

COUNTRY	VOLUNTEER MODEL
<b>El Salvador (USAID-funded)</b>	High school students as part of the social service requirement they must complete to graduate high school
<b>Malawi</b>	Pre-service teachers
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Caregivers with high motivation to support
<b>Uganda</b>	Community members who are interested in getting into the teaching profession
<b>Philippines</b>	Community members who are already volunteering with the Department of Education

<sup>1</sup> Accelerated Learning Programs or other long-term non-formal education programs are examples of solutions for learners who do not have immediate access to the formal education system or have been out of school for an extended period and need to catch up on multiple grades.

An additional step in the planning process is the contextualization and translation of learning activities. In Bangladesh, the team completed this task through a workshop where they aligned the reading and math skills included in the Catch-Up Club curriculum with national education standards and adapted social-emotional learning activities to local culture and perceptions of well-being.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Save the Children developed a set of global resources to support the implementation of Catch-Up Clubs, including the “Catch-Up Clubs Manual for Project Implementation” and the “Safe Back to School: Catch-Up Activity Guide” to help standardize the approach globally.

According to Save the Children staff, the key to successful implementation is providing leveled instruction in small groups, which helps to create rapid progress in reading outcomes. There are typically 12-15 children per class depending on the context. Sessions include 60-90-minute lessons in reading, math, and social-emotional learning that include activity- and play-based teaching methods enabling children to practice foundational skills in a fun and engaging way.

Another successful component of the Catch-Up Club approach is the provision of ongoing professional development to Catch-Up Club facilitators. Facilitators are often unpaid volunteers from the local community, many of which do not have a formal background in teaching. This makes continuous training of the facilitators imperative for the success of the program. In Bangladesh, each facilitator is paired with a coach who oversees instruction through session observations and feedback. Depending on local context, coaches could be Save the Children staff (if direct implementation), or a member of staff from a partner NGO or an appropriate government education leader (e.g., a Sector Education Officer). The coaches also attend a two-day coaches training.



Veronique, 14, at a Catch-Up Club at a Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda. Photo credit: Save the Children.

The coach also leads learning circles for facilitators to provide additional support and an opportunity for facilitators to collaborate.

A unique aspect of the Catch-Up Clubs approach is the incorporation of child protection and cash distributions into programming to increase participation and access for children. Save the Children incorporates child protection through community-level integrated case management, providing psychosocial support to children and their families and connecting them to relevant social services to reduce barriers to their participation. Additionally, vulnerable households receive cash voucher assistance enabling children’s engagement in education rather than on household chores or other forms of labor.



## MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

The Catch-Up Club approach is a data-intensive model that requires significant investment in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) at all levels. To support this model, Save the Children developed a standard set of outcome and output indicators (see example outcome indicator in Figure 1) and guidance on the tools and data systems needed for each indicator.

TABLE 2: Example Outcome Indicator for Catch-Up Clubs

LEVEL	NARRATIVE SUMMARY	INDICATOR	DEFINITION	TOOLS	FREQUENCY
Outcome	Children in the Catch-Up Clubs make progress in learning literacy skills	Percent of children enrolled in Catch-Up Clubs who successfully complete at least one club level	Numerator: children aged 8-13 who successfully completed their learning level according to the ASER test (achieve 70 percent)  Denominator: children enrolled in the Catch-Up Clubs	Catch-up Clubs Learning Assessment - adapted from the ASER assessment	At the end of each club "round" (2-3 weeks of sessions)

The ASER is essential to the design and implementation of Catch-Up Clubs. It is used to place students into leveled groups and monitor their learning throughout the program. In some contexts, Save the Children fully digitized data collection, using attendance tracking systems such as [Waliku](#) or tablet-based data collection using [Kobo](#), for the learning assessment, classroom observations, etc. The organization also established a global dashboard that consolidates learning assessment results as well as enrollment and attendance data from all implementing countries. This enables Save the Children to monitor Catch-Up Clubs data at the global level, compare data across different countries, and draw larger conclusions about the efficacy of the approach.

To generate evidence for the Catch-Up Club approach, Save the Children developed a list of recommended research questions that are aligned with the organization's global research and learning agenda. These questions are used by country programs to conduct impact evaluations through randomized controlled trials (RCT) or quasi-experimental studies, depending on budget and staffing availability.

In Bangladesh, the program team conducted an evaluation using a quasi-experimental design focused on the main research question: How many children reach the story level of the learning assessment by the end of the cycle? The program team defined "story level" as the level at which "children are starting to read and write connected texts, which are longer than the short paragraphs they were reading and writing at sentence level, with more advanced vocabulary." It is preceded by a "sentences level" and followed by "more advanced reading comprehension activities." The organization collected data through group and individual interviews with caregivers, Community Learning Facilitators, Head Teachers, and district education officials. The program also collected data using classroom observations and administered a social emotional learning (SEL) measurement tool, based on the International Social Emotional Learning

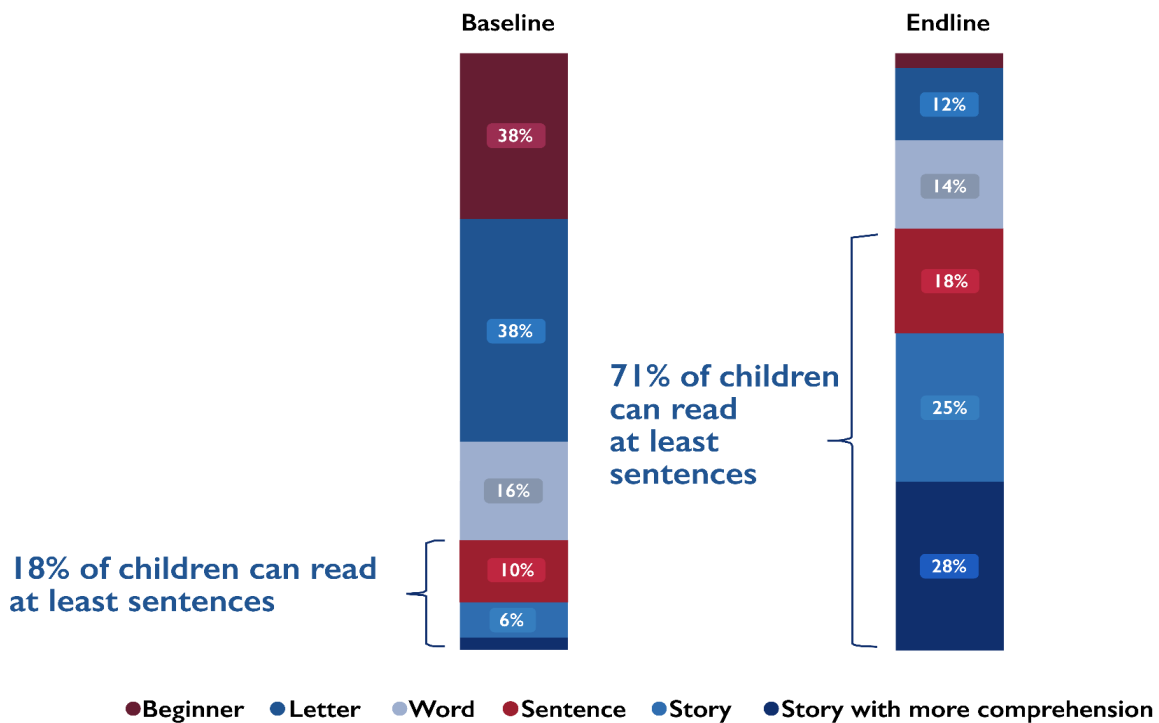
Assessment, and the [Washington Group's Short Set of Questions](#). Additionally, the program used a post-distribution monitoring survey in a sample of households to monitor cash distributions.

## EVIDENCE

Global data on Catch-Up Clubs show that it is a promising community-based approach for improving learning outcomes for children outside of school. In nine countries—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Malawi, Burma, Uganda, and the Philippines—after spending 50-60 hours in the Catch-Up Clubs:

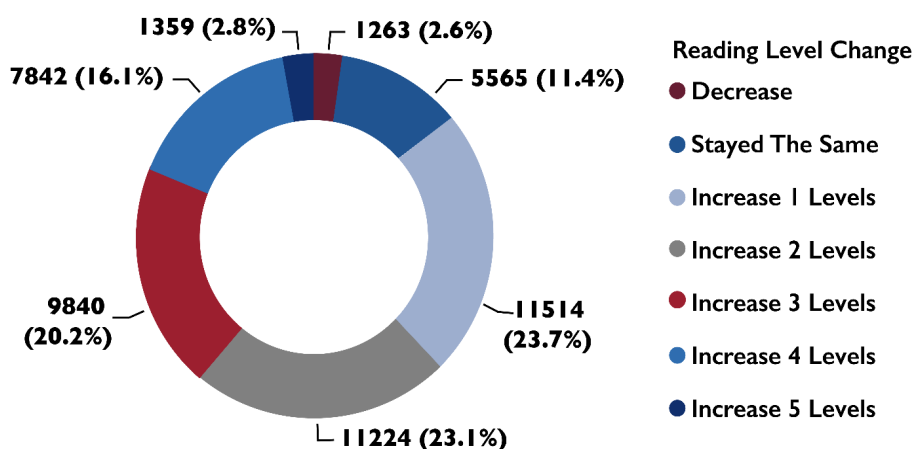
- 71 percent of children can read at least sentences, including 53 percent of children who can read a Grade 2 level text (see Figure 2).
- 72 percent of children progressed at least two literacy levels (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 2: Comparison of Reading Level at Baseline and Endline (50-60 Hours of Instruction) (Save the Children)



The ASER-based reading assessment includes five levels including letter, word, sentence, story, and story with comprehension. The tool assesses letter identification at the letter level, decoding at the word level, accuracy and fluency at the sentence and story levels, and fluency and comprehension at the story with comprehension level.

**FIGURE 3: Enrolled Learners Who Experience a Change in Reading Level Between Baseline and Endline (50-60 Hours of Instruction) (Save the Children)**



In terms of reading skill improvement, the proportion of learners able to read with comprehension at post-test was seven percentage points higher than the control group in the Philippines, 11.3 percentage points higher in Myanmar, 11.5 percentage points higher in Malawi, 21 percentage points higher in Colombia, 19 percentage points higher in Bangladesh, and 36 percentage points higher in Uganda.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a significant proportion of learners improved by at least one reading level as a result of their learning at the Catch-Up Clubs (Save the Children, 2023a; 2024). Catch-Up Clubs have effects ranging from 1.03 to 0.68 standard deviations in reading improvement, with the highest effect size observed in Bangladesh.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, there is evidence from a quasi-experimental study conducted in Burma that supports the integration of SEL into the Catch-Up Club model. An impact evaluation from the country shows that children who participated in Catch-Up Clubs had significantly higher SEL competency than children in a control group who did not participate. Statistical regression (Arlini et al., 2023) suggests that improved SEL competencies contributed to higher literacy outcomes, which adds to previous evidence on the spillover benefits of SEL for literacy (see Brown et al, 2023).

Save the Children (forthcoming) also identified a positive impact of cash transfers on children’s learning outcomes from an RCT in the Philippines. The program provided cash transfers to households for 13.4 percent of participating children. The endline survey demonstrated that children whose households received cash assistance from the program showed higher literacy results (reaching story and story with comprehension levels) compared to those who did not receive cash assistance from the program (21.5 percent vs. 14.4 percent). This is a potentially important finding as the majority of prior evidence on cash transfers and education has only identified a positive impact on school attendance, but not on learning outcomes (Millan et al., 2019).

<sup>2</sup> At the time of publication, Save the Children is still analyzing the data from Malawi and Bangladesh, and as such, these findings are preliminary.

<sup>3</sup> Effect size refers to a metric that helps to compare the impact of different interventions and indicate how meaningful the impact was. A common way to classify and understand effect sizes in education is: less than 0.05 is Small, 0.05 to less than 0.20 is Medium, and 0.20 or greater is Large (Kraft, 2019).

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## Success Story

*“Since Catch-Up Clubs started in our school, I am observing a change in the way children are able to express themselves. Children participating in Catch-Up Clubs are more active in class. Teachers have also learnt how to apply some of the play-based activities during lessons.”*

*- Headteacher, Wakiso, Uganda*

*“I used to read fun stories to the learners and play games with them. I also asked questions and gave them simple words to make sentences in pairs, which helped Rachael not only to read syllables but also to write some simple sentences and words. With this approach, she was able to improve her comprehension skills and answer questions effectively.” - Jacqueline, Catch-Up Club Facilitator, Kuyenda school*



Sanyu, 11, carrying books from the Catch-Up Club in Wakiso, Uganda. Photo credit: Save the Children.

*“I am very glad that Catch-Up Club session came to our community. It helped us a lot for children’s learning. My child enjoyed all its activities. Our children are now happy to read.” - Parent, Barishal*

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## LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The lessons learned outlined below were identified from the results and feedback from research studies, program reports, and interviews with staff.

1. **Catch-Up Clubs offer an example of a global approach that can be adapted.** The Catch-Up Club approach can be replicated and adapted to meet the needs of children in a variety of contexts. Some of the keys to successful implementation are localized needs assessment activities, selecting the best volunteer model for the community, contextualizing and translating learning activities, and identifying specific indicators and research questions to evaluate impact.
2. **Providing technical support and guidance at the global level can help to ensure quality implementation and data collection.** Although this level of support is not necessary to ensure the successful implementation of the approach, it does allow for greater knowledge sharing and continuous learning across the organization.
3. **The Catch-Up Clubs approach is an effective rapid (i.e., 13 week) solution that serves to support the transition of out-of-school children back to formal school.** The approach can also be appropriate for children who are currently enrolled in school and need additional support to master foundational skills. Accelerated Learning Programs or other long-term non-formal education programs are examples of solutions for children who do not have immediate access to the formal education system or have been out of school for an extended period and need to catch up on multiple grades.
4. **The successful implementation of Catch-Up Clubs is largely dependent on the use of community volunteers as facilitators.** Local implementers should select the volunteer model most likely to succeed in a given context for the program in collaboration with local education authorities, community leaders, and organizations, and should optimize local resources, interest, and availability.
5. **Catch-Up Clubs' play-based and community-led model provides struggling learners with supportive and enjoyable remedial learning opportunities that are free from the pressure of academic performance.** Through Catch-Up Clubs, children regain their self-confidence and motivation to further engage in education.
6. **The Catch-Up Clubs model quickly generates a high level of data due to the regular use of student assessments and attendance monitoring.** This helps improve the quality of implementation and generate evidence about what works in community-based education programming.
7. **The Catch-Up Clubs approach demonstrates the impact incorporating SEL and cash distributions into non-formal education programming can have on increasing student learning outcomes.** Recent research identified causal relationships between SEL skills and literacy learning outcomes in Burma as well as cash distributions and literacy learning outcomes in the Philippines.

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