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ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF A.J.&K. PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT:

While learning English as a foreign language, undergraduate students of Azad Jammu & Kashmir come across various difficulties which lead to fears, worries, tension and anxiety in them. The current study aimed to examine various levels of anxiety in English language learners at undergraduate level in Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Secondly, rank the sources of anxiety, and finally recommend applicable solutions to the teachers and students. The FLCAS has been applied on 700 undergraduate research participants and results have been derived by SPSS which discovered the presence of moderate level of anxiety in English language learners. Faculty development programs for higher education, a more supportive role for teachers and the adoption of activity-based learning methods for reducing anxiety levels in students at tertiary levels.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the principle means of expressing our ideas, feelings and emotions through spoken words, body movements and gestures (Ramalingam, 2013). According to psychologists, the language development has been started in children by the age of 6 months. Ramalingam (2013) and Akmajian, et.al (2015) have divided language into two stages, a) Holophrase (one word stage) b) Telegraph (multi word stage) (McGregor, 2015; Sigelman and Rider, 2009). Additionally, Brown's stages are also considered as the language development stages in children that include infants, toddlers and preschoolers. At various stages of life, a child has to communicate in several languages. The human capacity to learn second language after commanding first language can be observe at any time. Therefore, second language acquisition (SLA) is a phenomenon (Hummel 2014, Macaro, 2013) found among people in diverse fields of life. Second languages are learnt in school, at university, in the

workplaces and in the street. They are learnt at home by speaking to families, guardians and friends. Some learn alone through formal self-study whereas some learn informally by reading books or newspapers, and watching Television shows (Macaro, 2013).

Although the phenomenon of SLA has been explored by researchers of ‘Applied Linguistics’, millions of people worldwide from diverse fields of study are still engaged in study and a huge increase in experimental research is observed during the past few decades on a variety of dimensions related to it. Hummel (2013) fittingly argues that research in SLA is a truly multidisciplinary endeavor. Some of the major disciplines that contribute to SLA include theoretical linguistics, education, psychology and sociology and abundant literature in this field makes it recognized as an independent discipline in many higher education institutions for decades, whereas earlier, only introductory linguistics and second language pedagogy courses were offered.

In the twenty-first century, most people in the world can speak more than one language among whom a considerable number of people can speak three languages or more (Lane, n.d). The current estimate of the number of languages in the world put the number somewhere around 7,000. McGregor (2015) has pointed out a list of 7,105 languages of which 137 are deaf sign languages given in the latest edition of Ethnologue. Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian (Indo-European) and Japanese are the top nine languages that 40 percent of the population of the world speak. English is the third most spoken language of the world with 4.7 percent of the total population.

Pakistan is a multilingual and multi-cultural country where people can speak more than one language (Abdullah, 2016; Ahmad, 2011; & Shamim, 2007). They have learnt the regional languages as their mother tongue, Urdu as a national language. English has been taught from grade 1-12 as a compulsory subject (Shah, 2012) and as an essential subject at graduation level in all public and private institutions of Pakistan. While learning English as a foreign language, the students at various education level face various difficulties that provoke the foreign language anxiety.

Therefore, the current study aimed to address this research problem in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and explore the prevailing situation of anxiety faced by undergraduate students in public institutions of Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore the level of English language classroom anxiety among students at undergraduate level in public institutions by using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).
- To rank the causes of English language anxiety in the light of data collected through FLCAS

- To recommend strategies for language anxiety reduction in classroom and in students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term anxiety is generally defined as a state of uneasiness and fear consequential of expecting a threatening circumstances or event. Alrabai (2014) have declared anxiety as a “phenomenon which is characterized by a feeling of discomfort, nervousness, vague, fear and apprehension which is not associated with a specific situation or event” (as cited in Al-Khasawneh, 2016, p. 138). Furthermore, Caicki (2016) has elaborated that anxiety is a feeling of frustration, uneasiness, worry, self-doubt and apprehension. These feelings appeared when someone finds himself helpless in any situation. Anxiety is divided into many types such as trait, state and situational anxiety (Serraj & Noordin, 2013) whereas it has been divided into facilitating and debilitating as types of anxiety (Al-Khasawneh, 2016). Therefore, the present study has endeavored to consider the level of anxiety confronted by students in the classroom which is in fact a situational anxiety and debilitating aspect of anxiety that has hampered the English language learning process of the students.

As pointed out previously anxiety is a dominant factor in a foreign language learning realm and plays a vital role in language performance of learners therefore it is necessary here to understand the concept of foreign language anxiety as it is well-defined by numerous researchers. The language anxiety is the topic of interest of various investigators since the 1980's (Wang 2014 as cited in Elaldi, 2016) and since 1990s, second and foreign language researchers have become more aware of the complexities of language learning and have placed greater emphasis on 'students' academic emotion' (Trang, et al 2013 p. 96). Similarly, Elaldi (2016) has mentioned the work of several researchers in support of foreign language anxiety and its presence in students who are exposed to several negative experiences in a foreign language context.

According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) foreign language anxiety is the “feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language context, including speaking, listening and learning” is dissimilar to other kinds of anxiety (as cited in Elaldi, 2016). The current research is studying the anxiety of English language learners and its potential sources because in the setting of the current study English is also treated as a foreign language.

Many researches in the past have elaborated the various sources of foreign language anxiety among those the researchers such as Horwitz et al, (1986), Pappamihel (2002), Casado and Dereshiwsky (2004) have argued that in foreign language learning context, the learner may experience the three primary types of anxiety including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

Second language anxiety plays a curial role in the learning process of the students because it represents the emotional uncomfortable experience of students in the classroom. When a student is anxious about his learning discomforts, he may not be fully engaged in the classroom or may be lost his own thought that have nothing to do with the course. In such a situation, the

level of anxiety increases because the student is unable to comprehend the teacher and the text of the books. Moreover, the foreign language anxiety also affects the reading, writing, speaking and listening while taking the English language classes. The FLCA effects have been explored by many researchers such as Ahmed 2016, Liu & Chen 2015, Genc 2015, Ismail 2015, Rahmat 2014.

METHODOLOGY

The present study had been descriptive in nature in which the researcher had adopted cross-sectional survey design because the data from the respondents had been collected at one time. 700 respondents were selected by random sampling techniques from the higher education institutes of Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The firsthand data for the current study had been collected by Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) which consists of 33 close-ended item that ranked on 5-point Likert scale between Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

The FLCAS has been pilot tested on 200 undergraduate students and Cronbach Alpha of the collected data was $r=0.72$ which showed that the FLCAS would easily be used for data collection of the present study.

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative numerical data had been analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). The researcher has computed the mean of all items individually and then cumulatively to rank the sources of English language anxiety in undergraduate students in Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Out of 700 respondents 325 were male and 375 were females.

Variable Wise Data Analysis

The FLCAS, as discussed earlier, consists of 33 item that are divided into four components: 8 items for communication apprehension (1,9,14,18,24,27,29, and 32); 9 items for fear of negative evaluation (3,7,13,15,20,23,25,31, and 33); 5 items for test anxiety (2,8,10,19, and 21); and the remaining 11 items for anxiety of English classroom (4,5,6,11,12,16,17,22,28, and 30). These components are separately examined in this section to find out the level of anxiety faced by undergraduate students in Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension had been one of the sources of fear and anxiety faced by learners at various levels. The figure 1 is the cumulative representation of means of all items that were categorized as the communication apprehension statements. The results of the bar graph have shown that the respondents become anxious and started to panic when they were asked to communicate in English for which they were not prepared in advance. The total mean of these items had shown that the respondents face moderate or slight level of communication apprehension in the foreign language classroom. Similarly, Horwitz (2008) explained that the total mean of around 3 shows that students are moderate or slightly anxious, the total mean score below 3 shows that students might not face anxiety in the foreign language classroom and if the total mean score is more than 3 it shows that the student is highly anxious (as cited in Elaldi, 2016).

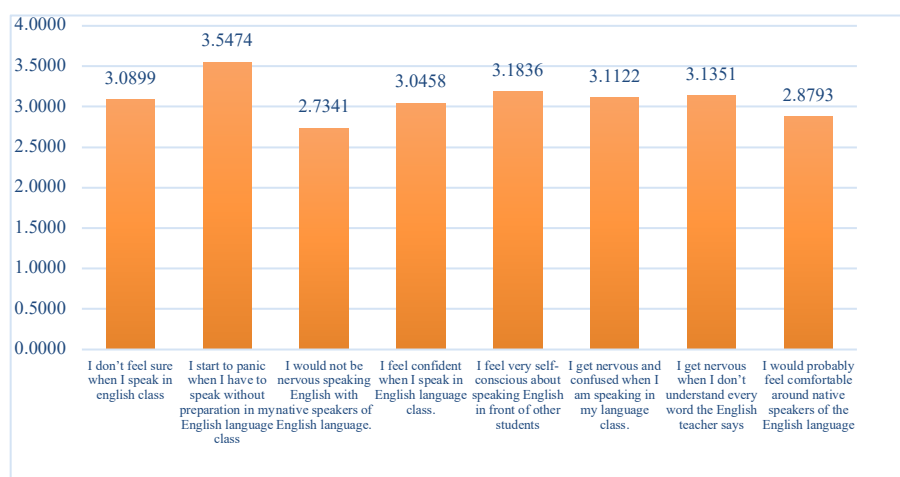


Figure1: Communication apprehension in undergraduate students of AJ&K Pakistan

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation is closely related to communication apprehension (Elaldi, 2016) and it arises when a learner is afraid of social evaluation. The bar graph in figure 2 had depicted the total means of assorted items related to fear of negative evaluation by the society which includes teachers, other classmates, family and friends but FLCAS has only measured the classroom as a place of fear of negative evaluation. Among all the statements the statement that says, “I always feel that other students speak English better than me” has the maximum mean of 3.26 which is of moderate level. Consequently, it can be concluded that the anxious students find other students superior than them in speaking English and it provokes the feeling of worry, apprehension and fear in them.

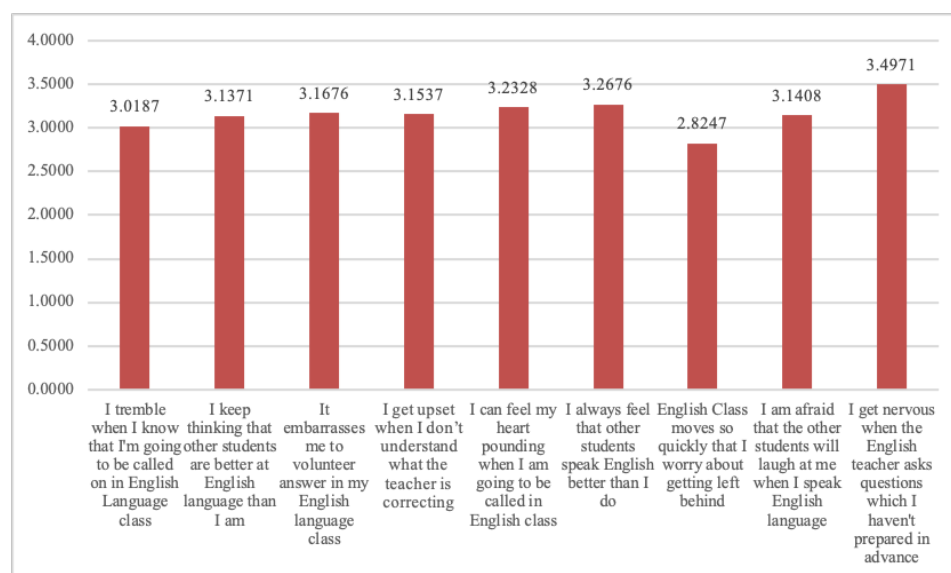


Figure 2: Fear of Negative evaluation in Undergraduate students of AJ&K Pakistan

Test Anxiety

Test refers to all formal and informal assessments teachers take to evaluate learners in the classroom. The students are afraid of tests even if they are well

prepared for them. The results of mean had shown in the bar graph in figure 3 had strengthened the evidence that learners of the English language at undergraduate level in Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir have faced moderate levels of test anxiety in the classroom that has a total mean 3.01, while the other classroom factors may make them more anxious about their performance. Hence, it can be determined that learners of English language remain at ease while taking tests during the class and they do not worry about the test scores or examination results. The respondents have not considered tests as a source of anxiety in the classroom.

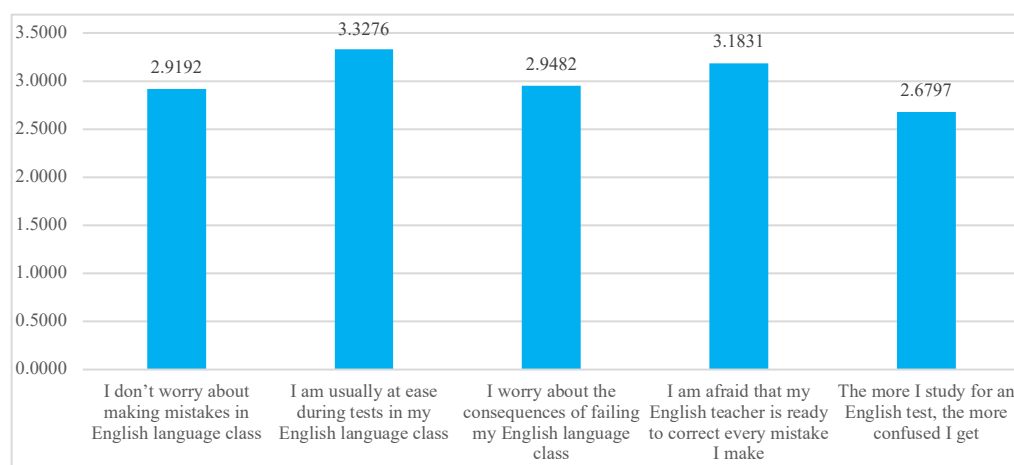


Figure 3: Test anxiety in Undergraduate Students of AJ&K Pakistan

Anxiety of English Classroom Procedures

English classroom procedures have not been discussed as an independent variable in Horwitz's theory of Foreign language anxiety, however many researchers have considered it as a separate variable that is sub divided into teachers' behaviours towards learners and the teaching learning process. The bar graph in figure 4 has highlighted the means of all items that are interpreted to examine the level of anxiety as well as ranking the sources of anxiety. The overall mean of English classroom is the highest among all with $M=3.12$. The maximum value of mean is around 3 that has shown that students face moderate level of anxiety while the results also depict that students are very anxious in the classroom situation especially when they are burdened with the grammatical rules. The mean of this item is 3.48 which is greater than other mean values of this section and even higher than total mean. Accordingly, it can be determined that the classroom situations often make learners of English language anxious and frightened, so they avoid staying for extended periods of time in such classroom situations.

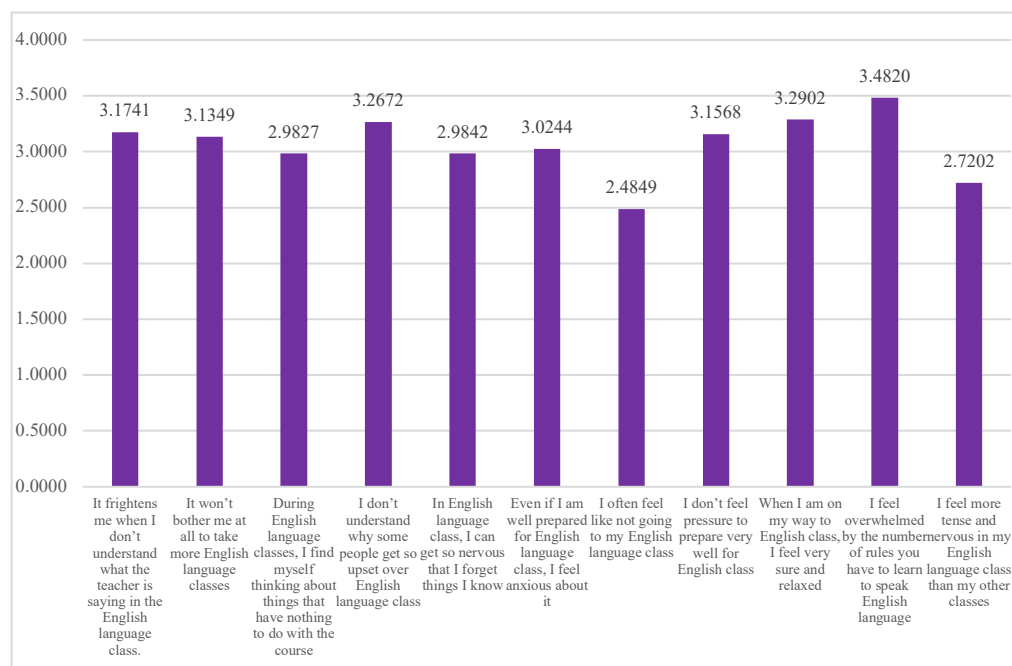


Figure 4: Anxiety of Classroom Procedures in Undergraduate Students of AJ&K Pakistan

Cumulative Means of Variables

The cumulative bar graph of the variable has been formed to meet the second objective of the research which ranked the sources of foreign language anxiety among undergraduate students of Mirpur Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The bar graph in figure 5 had provided a clear representation of the situation inside the classroom when respondents have been learning English in a foreign context and where teachers and classmates are also not native speaker. As shown in the figure 5 the major source of anxiety in learners of English language at undergraduate level in Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir is fear of negative evaluation which had an average mean of 3.16, while English language classroom anxiety had been considered as the second most prominent source of anxiety in students. Communication apprehension had ranked as the third major source of anxiety in language learners, and test anxiety had been categorized as the fourth major source of anxiety.

This ranking is entirely built on the responses received from the 700 participants studying English language at undergraduate level in various higher education institution of Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir. In summary, it is found that like many other international students, as discussed in the introduction and literature review, Pakistani students also become afraid of English as a foreign language. Although, the mean of FLCAS has shown a moderate level of anxiety, the levels of anxiety vary from situation to situation and from person to person.

These sources have been analyzed and reported in separate sections previously, but the aforementioned graph had appeared to illustrate the current situation of learners at undergraduate level in Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

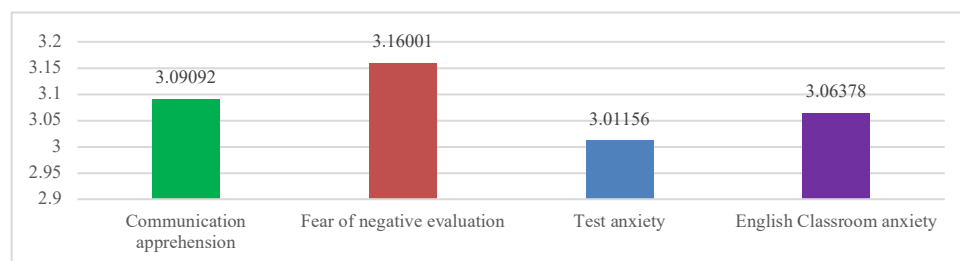


Figure 5: Cumulative Means of variables

Findings

Level of anxiety

The current study was planned to investigate anxiety as an ‘affective filter’ or factor (Krashen, 1978 as cited in Menezes, 2013 p.405) in the learning process of English as a foreign language in the context of Pakistan. As it was reported earlier, the researcher had found the total mean on Likert-scale is $M=3.07$ and standard deviation= 1.28 which has proved that undergraduate students of Mirpur Azad Jammu and Kashmir are having moderate/ slight levels of anxiety while learning English language in the classroom. The result of the present study for level of anxiety is parallel to the findings of research studies by Al-Khasawneh 2016; Husin, 2013; Rajanthran, 2013 & Prakash, 2013 who also found moderate levels of anxiety among their respondents while applying FLCAS. Furthermore, Khairi and Nurul Lina (2010) have claimed that the moderate feelings of anxiety in foreign language learning might increase the motivation in that language learning, and students would work hard steadily to acquire the target language (as cited in Al-Khasawneh, 2016 p.142).

The first research objective has been achieved by describing the statistical findings which agreed that students get upset, stay in nervousness and develop tension in themselves while speaking and communicating in the classroom and with the community. They might also feel helpless when the teacher asks them to answer the question in front of class or while taking tests. They might also be self-conscious when talking to native speakers. These situations have led them towards embarrassment, staying quiet or poor participation in classroom activities.

Sources of Anxiety

Secondly, according to the results, the topmost source of language anxiety is fear of negative evaluation with total mean $M=3.16$. This demonstrates that students are anxious when they find themselves judged by the teacher, class fellows and the community because they think their English language skills and competencies are lesser than others. They also feel embarrassed when teacher correct them in front of class or ask them to respond to some questions. To avoid such situations the anxious students, try to remain silent in class without taking part in the discussion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To rectify the fear of negative evaluation, it is suggested to teachers to build confidence in students to ask questions for learning without running the risk of being humiliated. In addition to that, it is highly recommended for the

teacher to build the trust of the students and avoid praising few students and ignoring other in the classroom.

- To reduce the communication apprehension in the learners it is suggested for English language teachers (ELT) to provide different opportunities to the learners to participate and converse in the target language in the classroom. For that purpose, group and project work are highly recommended for undergraduate (Paradowski, et.al 2015; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Furthermore, inclusion of oral examination and its prior practice in classroom can also help students to reduce communication apprehension. (Shah,2012)
- It is highly recommended to teach practical application of grammatical rules from the earliest classes and it is suggested to have English proficiency tests for every transformation of educational levels like primary to secondary, secondary to higher secondary and before tertiary.
- It is also recommended to have a foundation non-credit course in the curriculum for those students who are for any reason unable to pass the proficiency test before moving to the next level of education.
- It is also recommended to implement teaching learning techniques appropriate for the learning level of students along with the fitting use of audio-visual aids

FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Further research can be carried out for students from other regions and levels of education, and data can then be collected to investigate their levels of anxiety at diverse grades while applying the similar scale or with amendments. Secondly, the future research in the same research area can be conducted by using another research tool like interviews, complementary to the research problem, from teachers to inquire their perspectives on how classroom factors could influence FLA.

FINAL REMARKS

Since English has acquired the preeminent position of being the global language for business, it has been taught to students throughout Pakistan as a foreign language. Students have, however, found it a complex task and approached it with plenty of, fear and trepidation which then leads to deficient performances in communication tasks and examinations. Multilingualism can be blamed for some of this whereby the students learn more than two languages at the same time. The influence of the mother tongue (L1) on the target language (L2) brings an initial obstacle for learners and without proper support and mentoring can gradually become a continuous cause of tension for learners of English. Anxiety provoking sources include difficult textbooks and the irrelevant literature presented in them, background knowledge of language, social circles, demotivation from peers, uninspiring teacher attitudes, and poor language pedagogy, hardly allows students to translate taught concepts in their own words. These sources can be categorized into four major groups:

- Communication apprehension
- Fear of negative evaluation
- Test anxiety and

- Classroom procedures

From which fear of negative evaluation is the most highly ranked according to data collected for the present study.

This anxiety negatively influenced the learning process for which it is suggested that the classroom atmosphere should be friendly and conducive to learning, the teacher- student relationship should be strengthened and based on confidence and trust in each other. Furthermore, the activity-based learning followed by the application of knowledge in real-life situations have been offered for improved learning of a target language. This all would be possible if teachers are willing to enhance their teaching skills by partaking in continuous professional development and if students are willing to enthusiastically participate in the classroom activities.

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