Enhancing English First Additional Language Teaching and Learning in Grade seven Rural Classrooms: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Teaching Strategies

Lungiswa Nqoma iD
Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

Abstract. Language used for teaching and learning (LoLT) is considered as the essential tool that drives learning in classrooms. When the language of teaching and learning is not the mother tongue (MT) it becomes a barrier to teaching and learning. This study aims to evaluate strategies that can be employed to foster teaching and learning in English First Additional Language (EFAL) classrooms. The study employed a qualitative research method through case study design. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and class observations; it made use of purposive sampling which involved ten educators and seven learners from grade seven classrooms. Thematic analysis approach was adopted to analyse the collected data and themes were extracted. Findings of this paper showed that language as medium of instruction (MoI) plays a crucial role in teaching and learning, and the confusion could lead to a mismatch of concepts and ideas when it is different from learners' and educators' home languages. This requires EFAL educators to possess specific first additional language teaching competencies, skills, and an extremely high sense of personal linguistic proficiency in the language of instruction (LOI). The paper, therefore, recommends that to improve EFAL learners' performance, language educators must utilise conceivable teaching and learning strategies that would be relevant to the subject, content, topics, and class activities. It was also recommended that EFAL learners be exposed to language learning programs that would develop and improve basic language skills in the targeted language. Educators are encouraged to use handcrafted teaching resources and DoE renovate infrastructure and provide basic resources.

Keywords: teaching strategies; First Additional Language; teaching and learning, language of instruction

1. Introduction

The language used in classrooms for communication and content delivery during teaching and learning is referred to as a language of instruction (LOI), language

of teaching and learning (LOLT), or medium of instruction (MOI) (Macaro et al., 2018). It is important for cultural transmission through the cannons of literature and the body of knowledge that are permitted by educational policy, as well as being recognized as a medium for teaching and learning. Rabiah (2018). sees it as an enabling tool that shapes identity, knowledge and facilitates teaching and learning of content subjects. It is also perceived as an essential tool for communication in the classroom for learners to voice their understanding or dissatisfaction about the content subjects (Van Rijt & Copper, 2017). However, majority of learners who speak African languages in Africa, and particularly in South Africa, face threats to the quality of their teaching and learning. Since the middle of the 20th century, there has been worried about the linguistic mismatch between the language of learning and home language (Van Rijt & Copper, 2017). South African Constitution has stipulated the right for all learners to receive education in the language of their choice recognising the equality of the eleven official languages however, the use of languages in classrooms has been a contentious subject in South Africa. Despite the growing success of mother tongue (MT) instruction, (Motseke, 2020), many schools in Southern African countries such as Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe use English as the medium of instruction (EMOI) to English non-native classrooms. This has given additional weight when educators are not native speakers of the language of teaching (in this case, English). The challenge is made more difficult when they are not sufficiently fluent in the language of instruction, making it extra harder to grasp what they are saying. Arjomandi et al. (2021) suggest the teaching strategies that could be used on instructional activities to assist second language learners to fully participate and be able to conceptualise relevant information. Arjomandi et al. (2021) believe that active teaching strategies involve learners more fully in the learning process as they increase comprehension and academic performance.

Duplessis and Mestry (2019) believe that rural EFAL schools are side-lined as a result, the challenges they encounter in using English MOI since lower grades are still visible in higher grades (grade 7 in the case of this paper). Most EFAL schools in the outskirts of East London experience challenges in the language of teaching and learning, Malebese et al. (2019) argue that lack of significant skills in FAL learning has been worsened by the framework used in the education language policy which does not provide adequate support for rural areas which tend to lag urban areas. Rural education is not given enough attention, and the educational framework and policy documents do not adequately address the unique needs and requirements of rural schools (Makgato,2014). This blanket approach hinders effective teaching and learning in these locations as educators are not proficient in English language, these educators feel unqualified and underprepared to academically manage their classrooms (Makgato, 2014).

As a result, this interferes with the significant and sensitive role LOI has on teaching and learning (Kim et al.,2019). Learners can express their understanding of the lesson from the teachers' feedback and written texts in the classroom. In the case of this paper, both learners and educators are English first additional speakers from isiXhosa community and have used isiXhosa home language for

the first 3 years (grade 1-grade3) of schooling and only learnt English language as a subject. English language is less important in this community as a result, parents or guardians use home languages to assist with homework. However, in grade 4 these learners must shift to EFAL learning and teaching as stipulated in the language policy and are expected to have acquired a reasonable proficiency of English language. Makgato (2014) highlights the serious communication and learning problems faced daily by EFAL educators and learners in African classrooms. Due to their poor English language ability and the fact that many of these learners are from non-White neighbourhoods, they frequently struggle to meet the academic objectives. Learning in a new language hinders learners' academic performance and improvement as they must learn the language and the content simultaneously which makes it difficult to complete activities that require research, oral presentation and sometimes find it difficult to comprehend instructions in the new language (Frans, 2016). English has become lingua franca; therefore, many schools has opted for it as Language of instruction hence, the need to evaluate strategies that could be used in English first additional classes to relieve them on challenges they experience.

Evaluating these teaching strategies may assist teachers to identify best practices that could enhance proficiency in EFAL teaching and learning outcomes. It is also significant to investigate how these strategies impact on learner engagement as well as how they could be used to address challenges faced by learners with limited English language background. Exploring and determining relevant and suitable EFAL teaching strategies may promote academic performance to EFAL learners in rural schools.
This paper attempted to respond to the questions listed below:

1.1 Research Questions
- How can EFAL teaching strategies be implemented to enhance teaching and learning in grade seven rural classrooms?

- How can the EFAL grade seven learners and educators be supported to improve their English language proficiency to be able to use it as language of learning?

2. Literature Review
2.1 South African language in education policy and its implementation in EFAL classrooms
South African Constitution (RSA,1996a), South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996b), South African and South African Language Policy (1997) emphasize that all learners have the right to be taught in official languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that could be reasonably possible (Kepe & Linake, 2019). Language policy, according to Peltokorpi and Vaara (2017) is an attempt by a person with or claiming to have authority to alter another person's use of language (or ideology). The person who created the language policy has some control over others who must abide by its rules. Kirkpatrick et al. (2017) underline the fact that educational staff members of a particular institution frequently follow and act as implementers of these policies without examining their value,

suitability, or relevance to learners' successful learning. In order to address historical inequities and bring equality and equity to the educational system, South Africa developed a multilingual language policy after 1994 (LiEP, 1997; Curriculum, 2005; South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996) (Kepe & Linake, 2019). This policy encouraged the use of more than one language during teaching and learning as needed by learners to improve and support the development of indigenous language programs to redress the previously disadvantaged languages (Mohohlwane,2019). Even though South Africa has 11 official languages, English is still widely spoken and used in different sectors including education institutions (Mohohlwane, 2019). This has led to many parents going out of their way in ensuring that their children receive education in English due to its effect on social status, quality of education, career, and region. South African language policy (LiEP,1997) and the Department of Education (DoE, 2007) permit teaching of one official language to support the additive method when learners are in the foundation phase (grades 1-3) (Beckmann et al., 2003). The medium of instruction (MOI) a school offers in the intermediate or senior phases depends on the resolutions made by the school governing body (SGB) and learners when choosing their language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). South African National Curriculum Statement (NCS); South African Department of Education (SADoE) (2002) declared that first additional language (FAL) may also be used as LOLT as long as its teaching and learning reaches levels of proficiency that meet the level required for efficient learning across the curriculum (Chisholm,2005). The recognition of English language receives globally makes SGBs' to choose it as the primary language even in EFAL schools as many schools shift to English instruction after the first three years of schooling despite its lack of proficiency to both educators and learners (Basson,2019).

2.2 Lack of Resources

According to Mang'uui et al. (2021) a learner is more likely to succeed if they have access to a variety of resources. Sometimes education doesn't come through lecturing in a classroom; instead, learners learn by engaging with their surroundings and using a variety of tools. Saviour et al. (2022) assert that a dearth of resources is the major cause of learners' subpar performance. Current studies show that school resources are pointedly enough to be considered as pedagogically significant (Bottiani et al., 2019) and Mojapelo (2020) claim that most South African schools lack basic resources which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to completely execute the English FAL curriculum. Nascimento (2008) emphasizes the relationship between resources and achievement and has concluded that resourced schools are performing better and without considering the substantial methodological flaws that raise questions about the reliability of any conclusions are revealed when determining school resources endogenously.

2.3 Teaching Strategies applied in multilingual classrooms.

Second language teaching forced educators to explore strategies that could assist learners to improve their performance, strategies such as rote learning especially in rural schools where even educators do not have sufficient level of proficiency in the language of learning (Teng & Zhang, 2020). Rote memory is a technique for learning in which one memorizes facts or figures repeatedly to instil them in their memory banks, it has no connection to prior knowledge which means it does not

encourage social skills. The second strategy is inclusion: the policy of inclusion as stated in the Education White Paper on Special Needs Education is one of the vital aspects impacting teaching in South Africa and has been contributing to the rise of multilingualism in South African classrooms (Beckmann et al., 2003). The assumption was that parents in the spirit of language redress would request mother tongue instruction for their children (Nishanthi, 2020). However, many parents, because of the status English holds globally, they exercised their right by enrolling their children in English medium schools (Fleisch & Woolman 2007). As a result, a lot of classrooms nationwide are now multilingual and multicultural. Due to the difficulties of teaching linguistically varied learners while upholding educationally acceptable standards, many schools adapted code-switching strategy to cope with first additional language challenges. Moore (2002) explains code-switching as a process when learners alternately use multiple linguistic codes in the classroom (Moore,2002). There are additional alternatives for speech when participants in an engagement speak more than one language (Van der Walt & Dornbrack, 2011). Code-switching can be seen as a variety of linguistic resources that a speaker can select from to effectively communicate (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020). They also believe that learners can get a head start on effective and successful learning by being exposed to code-switching at the early phases of learning (Beatty- Martinez et al.,2020). Secondly, it aids in the gradual acquisition of the target language and the ability to learn the intended material by these learners.

3. Theoretical Framework: Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), views language as a crucial element in achieving the educational process and serves as the theoretical foundation for this paper. Constructivism, especially in its social aspects, a learner is constructively engaging in a co-operative effort with the teacher to produce and construct new meanings (Vygotsky,1978). He makes further distinctions between "social constructivism," which emphasizes how meanings and understandings emerge from social interactions, and "cognitive constructivism," which is about how each learner understands things in terms of developmental stages and learning styles. In this context, Vygotsky asserts that learner's ability to express concepts clearly through language is essential to learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Due to their limited exposure to the language and inability to function in English teaching and learning environments, it is difficult for educators and learners to learn using a foreign language (English in this case) (Dahms et al., 2007). It is stated in the Zone of Proximal Development that a student can be helped to complete a challenging task by an instructor or more experienced classmates (Dahms et al., 2007). This shows that when educators are adequately prepared and have access to resources, they may be able to choose effective teaching methods that would help learners transition from dependence to independence learning. All the participants in this paper came from rural locations where the English language is little spoken. Due to their inadequate English language skills, they are unable to meet academic demands when using EFAL as LoLT. According to this theory, it is the teacher's primary duty to promote learning in a classroom environment. Facilitated talks, in-depth arguments, and the creation of lively groups can all help with cognitive skill development.

4. Methodology
4.1 Research Approach
This paper employed qualitative research approach as it enables a detailed and additional questioning of participants based on their responses (Busetto et al., 2020). Additionally, the researcher sought to comprehend educators and learners' views on the use EFAL as LoLT in English non-native classrooms and the strategies they implement to promote effective learning and teaching. Case study design was adopted as it assisted the researcher to plan and implement the study in a way that would help her to obtain the intended results, thus the design may increase the chances of obtaining information that could respond to the research questions (Flick, 2020). The case for this paper were seven learners and ten educators in grade seven from a rural primary school (in isiXhosa speaking community) in the Eastern Cape which were purposively selected. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews to accommodate the participants' availability (De Jonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) and observation method. Observation schedule and guide were developed, and the researcher visited the site 3 times a week for 3 weeks to determine the teaching strategies used and to gain the most accurate data on how lessons were conducted, if learners understood instructions and how they engaged during the lesson. The collected data (interviews and observation) was analysed through thematic analysis, to achieve an understanding of patterns of meanings from data on lived experiences, the researcher categorized the presented data according to themes (Sundler et al., 2019). Themes below were extracted from the analysed data:

i) Unsatisfactory relationship between language policy and its practises
ii) Code switching
iii) Lack of vocabulary due to lack of resources.

Informed consent from the participants and learners' parents was sought prior to the intervention. Both educators and learners received information regarding the study's topics and processes involved.

5. Results
In rural educational settings, particularly in Grade 7 EFAL classrooms which were the final year of primary education, marking the culmination of the foundational phase of schooling, the question of language instruction holds significant importance at this grade. The choice of language as a medium of instruction can shape not only the learning experiences of students but also their academic outcomes and future opportunities (Liyanage & Walker, 2019). In this context, the use of English as a first additional language (EFAL) raised various considerations and challenges such as, vocabulary development, language structure and language acquisition. The following data showed a collection of perspectives from educators and learners regarding the implementation of EFAL teaching strategies in Grade 7 rural classrooms. These insights shed light on the complexities surrounding language instruction, including learners' preferences, educators' observations, and the impact of language proficiency on learners' self-confidence and prospects. By examining these perspectives, researcher and gain

a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play and identify strategies to foster effective EFAL teaching and learning in rural classrooms. Below are the themes, interview questions and participants' responses.

5.1 Unsatisfactory Relationship between South African Language Policy in Education and its Practises

The following question helps to elicit the theme language policy.

Q. What do you feel about learning in English language?

The citations below are from the interviews with the educators and produced the theme above:

Educator -1: *Many learners prefer to speak their own language or language they love and succeed at, like "tsotsi taal" (smugglers' language), because they are familiar with the language and devoted to it. They refuse to engage in English language and would speak it little and run back to isiXhosa.*

Educator-2: *Even though English is a new language to them and hard to learn the fundamentals, it helps to increase their self-confidence. It would be much better if we had enough books, technological devices like in cities and township just to entice them to learn it more.*

Educator-3: *They are willing to learn in English, and many of them are aware that it is the language that is used by most people throughout the world when you encounter someone who does not speak your native tongue. So, they see the need to learn it, but it is not easy.*

How do you feel about learning in English language?

Learner-7: *I occasionally get frustrated when I don't understand what the teacher is asking or what I'm reading since I don't fully understand English.*

Learner-1: *We were never given* a *choice whether I like it or not, because everything is done in English, including our textbooks and all of the examinations, tasks, and exams.*

Learner-3: *I love it and have no issue with that because speaking it will help me acquire a better job.*

Findings revealed that educators were struggling to get learners on board to effectively implement the language policy as the learners prefer to use their regional language and believe that English language is the urban language. They believe that lack of resources in rural schools have blocked them from joining the trend to teach in EFAL as township and city schools since they have many teaching aids and technical resources available to them. Despite learners' English language incompetence, some of them indicated that they enjoy learning in English and believe it to be the language of upper class, which could lead to better opportunities in the future. However, some admitted that learning in English was difficult and frustrating, and they felt they had no choice in using it as language of learning. Both learners and teachers acknowledged the importance of English on a worldwide scale and the notion that learning it might help learners acquire confidence and expand their horizons, but they highlight the challenges they encounter in using it for teaching and learning.

5.2 Teaching Strategies Used to Support Learners from Rural Areas to Develop EFAL Proficiency
Q: Do you use code-switching, if yes how does it support your teaching?
INTERVIEWS:
Educator-1: *Yes, because I must first explain everything in their language, they take three hours to learn something that could just take an hour. If not, they will just stand there and look confused. And won't understand what you are trying to say. Additionally, kids waste time playing instead of working, and it is challenging to pay attention to each learner due to the large numbers.*

Educator-4*: I use it for explanation and clarity purposes. And I provide them with a lot of homework and sometimes assignments, but it doesn't work since these kids react in their native tongue, which is not permitted. In addition, most of them don't finish their schoolwork, so there are times when it is just a waste of time since nobody is home to watch them.*

Educator-8: *I don't code-switch, and we use English to practice because when I do, I notice that they want to take the class twice: once in their native tongue and once in English. When you ask them questions, they answer in their native tongue, which is not allowed.*

The researcher noticed that two mostly used teaching strategies were code-switching and interpretation. Findings from E1, E2 and E3 revealed that implementing these strategies promoted learner engagement as they were able to make sense of what is taught and participated. However, over implementation of these strategies can be time consuming, hinders development of the new language and also disrupts the proper implementation of SA language policy. Hence E8 boldly indicated that code switching, and interpretation were not used in class.

Findings from observation revealed that learners frequently turned to their mother tongue when they were stuck because they lacked sufficient vocabulary in the language used as MOI. During the observation, the researcher observed that techniques including learning stations, think-pair-share, and discussion approaches were used; however, all these techniques were initially used in isiXhosa (home language), and learners were not punished for doing so. Lessons grew longer because of this.

5.3 Lack of Resources
5.3.1 Interviews:
Educator -3: *Spelling is a big problem; some of their written work looks like they wrote in Chinese, making it impossible to understand what they were attempting to write or even struggle to identify the head or tail of the work. It could be that they are unable to visualize or comprehend what the instruction entails. My students rely on my hand made resources and sometimes they don't take good care of them, they get dirty, torn and sometimes missing. So, for such cases they must use their imagination when presenting the lesson.*

Educator-5: *Many students struggle with pronunciation, misread spelling in writing, and misinterpretation of information and inquiries. Perhaps it's because we tend to*

theorize everything, but owing to lack of resources, concrete teaching cannot be put into practice. Having no tools, lessons don't usually give our students any new insights; instead, they force them to memorize.

Educator-10: *They lack vocabulary in the language "abanasigama kule language'', having few books is not helping." Now, whenever they don't know an English word, there are no dictionaries. So have to pimply move on with incomplete information, lack the resources to badly affect the lesson. We are in a village, as such all learners here do not own phones, so using technology to support teaching is a fairy tale.*

Findings revealed that due to the learning obstacles caused by this lack of facilities and resources, learners were socio-culturally disadvantaged. E1, E2 and E3 responses suggested that chalkboards, chalk, and textbooks were the main teaching tools primarily employed. Findings also highlighted that learners' limited ability to use the language in various circumstances appeared to have an impact on targeted language development and comprehension. The lack of suitable libraries, scientific labs, and facilities complicated EFAL teaching and learning as it was another indicator of resource shortage in the data. Researcher noticed that learners could not relate any content to their daily life because it was primarily done in theory, this hinders their learning progress.

5.3.2 Observations
The school lacked a functioning library, scientific lab and computer lab. Teachers were forced to adapt and urged the students to conduct their research in public libraries. The only tools they had were chalkboard, chats, textbooks and a few workbooks. To clarify their teachings, they used textbooks and chalkboard diagrams.

5.4 Discussion of Findings
5.4.1 Language Education Policies
A significant problem is also presented by the lack of strict oversight of the application of language policy in schools located in rural areas (Kretzer & Kaschula, 2022). Findings showed that the school had no monitoring tool to ensure proper implementation of the language policy. All educators claimed that they implement the language policy in their classrooms; however, observing their teaching practises indicated a different story. Despite the excellent intentions behind the language policy, the researcher felt that the main issue with the insufficient political effort and interest, along with a lack of funding necessary to support the program's successful implementation of the national language policy in rural schools, characterized the policy's implementation strategy (Cushing, 2020). The researcher: therefore, strongly felt that the school current conditions is not conducive for appropriate implementation of the language policy in rural schools as both educators and learners have not gained an adequate understanding of the language. Hence, Jalal, and Nawab (2022) remind us that learning is impacted by language of teaching and learning when it is different from the home language as it limits constructive communication in the classroom. The data also showed that learners encountered a variety of challenges when attempting to use a newly adopted language of learning and teaching in their daily school activities. The most common issues involved understanding lessons,

taking notes, participating in classroom deliberations, and retrieving information from books. Many learners stated that they had difficulties in comprehending English lessons, particularly when it came to taking their own notes or discussing the educators' explanations. Some learners stated that they became disoriented and chosen to wait until the educators wrote something on the board for them to copy.

The preceding argument assumed that learning English as a second language influences learner participation in classroom discussions. As a result, the researcher believes that being taught in the learner's native language is a privilege in and of itself, as it can improve the learners' academic performance and content knowledge. On these grounds, the paper contends that, in the absence of MT as MOI, a provision for learners' home language translation of questions and texts should be made. This suggestion is based on the idea that their poor performance could be due to a lack of understanding of the MOI rather than a lack of content knowledge.

5.4.2 Teaching Strategies Used to Support Learners from Rural Areas to Develop Proficiency in EFAL

In order to facilitate knowledge acquisition and understanding, learners should be involved in planning and arranging their engagement through a set of tasks called a learning strategy (Mahmud & Nur, 2018). Teaching strategies lie at the centre of teaching and learning; it is what educators need to know and the skills they need to command to make and justify the kinds of decisions that constitute teaching (Akinyenye & Plddemann, 2016). Findings revealed that strategies such as code- switching, code mixing, discussion, learning stations, question and answer, and think-pair-share were used by both educators and learners to enhance the learning process. Van Viet (2022) emphasizes the importance of using appropriate learning strategies to gain better outcomes and performances. The researcher noticed that code switching and code-mixing were the mostly used strategies in the classrooms; findings also revealed the overuse of these strategies results in hindering learning of the new language (Zainil & Arsyad, 2021).

Ezeh et al. (2022) define code switching and code mixing as the act of alternating between two languages, dialects, or even the same language's registers. Responses from educators indicated that using some of these strategies in a way limited learners' English language development and the researcher noticed having no thoughtfully plan on implementing these strategies might prevent educators from achieving learning outcomes and learning objectives aimed.

5.4.3 Lack of Vocabulary vs Lack of Resources

South African schools located in rural areas are marginalised and under-resourced (Duplessis & Mestry,2019). Numerous rural schools lack the physical resources, fundamental infrastructure for sanitization, water, roads, transportation, electricity, and information and communication technology that urban schools take for granted (Duplessis & Mestry,2019). Findings revealed that the school had no proper infrastructure, sanitation and water, no library, science, and computer laboratories. This was a sign that reading culture and hands-on learning had been neglected. Zaid (2020) argues that words supplemented by pictures and real-world examples tend to motivate new readers to learn how to

read. He goes on to say that print-rich settings have the potential to influence learner readers to perform above average; thus, tend to be more curious to notice unfamiliar words around them. Baceviciute et al. (2021) state that lack of a print-rich environment may be the source of learners' poor literacy skills, which can impede unconscious learning. Findings revealed that a lack of resources limited educators' ability to experiment with and implement new teaching methods. Lack of resources negatively impacted on learners' cognitive development as they struggled to spell, construct simple sentences, or read with comprehension in the new language. Moreover, the learning stations were not effectively serving their purposes of improving reading skill or doing oral work.

5.5 Conclusion
Based on the evaluation of the teaching strategies used in rural classrooms, there is a need for further improvement to better foster English First Additional Teaching and Learning. The use of English as a language of teaching and learning has a negative impact on English non-native learners and it is important to recognize the challenges faced by rural communities, such as a lack of resources and infrastructure, and to work towards overcoming these challenges to provide quality education for all. Allowing learners to use their primary language for thinking, discussion, and as a resource for teaching and learning is in a way disadvantages the learning of the new language. Knowing which approaches to use, how to use them and when is the key for educators because without proper planning the exercise becomes unproductive. Effective application of these strategies may result in a shift away from the obstacles outlined in this paper to the improvement of cognitive development in the new language.

5.6 Recommendations
To address FAL issues, exposing EFAL educators to various teaching strategies through teacher training and professional development is highly recommended to improve the effectiveness of teaching strategies used in rural classrooms. Subject workshops that would equip educators on which strategies to use on certain topics and a plan on how to use them is recommended. Learners should be exposed to a variety of programs where their basic language skills can be developed and improved. Debates, presentations, acting, and skill-based programs are examples of such programs. It is further recommended that schools with limited resources encourage educators to use handcrafted teaching resources such as charts, photographs, and any visual aids they can get their hands on to help learners make a connection between the content knowledge being covered and its relevance to everyday life. And lastly, Department of Basic Education should provide more resources and infrastructure to rural schools, such as textbooks, computers, and internet access.

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