

From Classrooms to Camps: English Teachers' Lived Experiences in the National Learning Camp at Clarendio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 10 Aug 2025; Received in revised form: 08 Sep 2025; Accepted: 12 Sep 2025; Available online: 16 Sep 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords—National Learning Camp-1, English teacher experiences-2, COVID-19 education disruptions-3, Camp environment-4, English language teaching-5.</p>	<p><i>This research examined the lived experiences of Junior High School (JHS) English teachers at Clarendio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries within the National Learning Camp (NLC) framework. Amidst the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines, like many other nations, witnessed disruptions in its education system. The National Learning Camp, introduced by the Department of Education (DepEd), aimed at addressing the educational impact of the pandemic through a voluntary learning recovery program. The study explored the challenges faced by English teachers, identified factors contributing to positive and negative experiences, and provided recommendations for enhancing NLC experiences. The research objectives aimed to inform future English teacher volunteers, contributing to the program's implementation improvement. Using a qualitative research design and phenomenological methodology, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and secondary sources. The research focused on five themes: (1) Adaptability to New Setting, (2) Learning Abilities, (3) Participation & Motivation, (4) Training, and (5) Aspirations. Teachers shared their struggles adapting to the camp environment, addressing diverse learning abilities, managing student participation and motivation, critiquing training inadequacies, and expressing aspirations for better learning environments. The findings highlighted the complexity of NLC experiences, emphasizing the need for tailored teacher training, comprehensive understanding of student needs, and addressing motivational challenges. Despite the hardships, teachers expressed resilience and dedication. The study contributed valuable insights for improving NLC implementation and informed educational strategies for challenging contexts.</i></p>

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English in the Philippines has long been recognized as a challenging yet rewarding profession, marked by educators' dedication,

commitment, and innovative teaching methods. In the context of language education, English teachers play a crucial role in enhancing students' language skills, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing (Talampas & Martinez, 2021).

The main goal is to foster language fluency and literacy, preparing students for academic success and future endeavors (Moolngoen, 2017). However, the landscape of education underwent a seismic shift with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly impacting teaching methods and student learning outcomes.

The Philippines, like many other countries, faced disruptions in the education system due to extended school closures and the necessity to adapt to alternative modes of teaching. The World Bank (2021) reported a substantial increase in learning poverty during the pandemic, particularly in English language proficiency, with nine out of ten Filipino children under the age of 10 unable to read a simple text in English. Additionally, poor performance in reading comprehension, science, and mathematics, as revealed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018, highlighted the urgent need for effective interventions to address the learning setbacks.

In response to these challenges, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the National Learning Camp (NLC), a voluntary learning recovery program aimed at mitigating the educational impact of the pandemic. The implementation of the NLC is in line with the "MATATAG: Bansang Makabata, Batang Makabansa" agenda and as a sub-program under the National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP) which is the new direction of DepEd to resolve basic education challenges. As specified in DepEd Order No. 014, series of 2023, the NLC is a voluntary three-to five-week learning recovery program for teachers and learners in public elementary and secondary schools. It started its phased implementation with Grades 7 and 8 focusing on English, Science, and Mathematics during the 2022-2023 end-of-school year break. The NLC, implemented in a camp-like environment, focuses on English, Science, and Mathematics, seeking to facilitate a holistic learning recovery.

However, despite all the efforts of the government to address all the gaps and problems of the students in the implementation of the National Learning Camp, teachers as the direct implementers of the curriculum have been greatly affected and challenged to implement this program successfully.

Hence, it is worth knowing how they perceive this program, and what are their struggles and challenges with this learning recovery program.

This research focused on exploring the lived experiences of Junior High School (JHS) English teachers in the National Learning Camp at Clarendio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries (CCMSF). It aimed to identify the challenges faced by English teachers, recognize the factors contributing to positive and negative experiences, and develop recommendations for improving their experiences within the NLC. The research objectives are grounded in the broader goal of informing future English teacher volunteers about potential challenges and opportunities within the NLC, thereby contributing to the enhancement of the program's implementation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Department of Education (DepEd) has undergone a transformative shift, demanding innovative pedagogical approaches to adapt to changing dynamics in learning. The implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC) by DepEd represents a significant paradigm change, particularly impacting English teachers-volunteer who are required to adjust their instructional methods to this new educational landscape to cater to the needs of the students.

To explore the transformative impact of distance learning, Talampas and Martinez (2021) lay the foundation for understanding broader challenges and opportunities presented by alternative teaching modalities. Although not specific to national learning camps, this study provides insights that resonate with the experiences of English teachers in the National Learning Camp. However, a research gap exists in understanding how the transformative impact of distance learning aligns with or differs from the immersive nature of national learning camps.

Condino's (2021) research on the challenges faced by Junior High School English teachers during the first school year of Online Distance Learning sheds light on the parallels between this study and the experiences of English teachers navigating the National Learning Camp. This study underscores the

impact of new educational norms, yet a research gap lies in comprehending how these challenges might manifest differently in the distinct context of national learning camps.

Aligning with the National Learning Camp scenario, Boholano, Jamon, and Cabanes-Jamon's (2022) study emphasizes teachers' lived experiences and the utilization of qualitative research designs within the context of Modular-Distance Learning. A research gap emerges in understanding whether the challenges and strategies identified in Modular-Distance Learning are transferable or unique to the national learning camp context.

Castro's (2023) focus on ESL teachers in non-native English-speaking countries provides insights into challenges, particularly pronunciation, resonating with the specialized context of the National Learning Camp. However, a research gap exists in exploring how the challenges faced by ESL teachers in non-native settings may differ or align with those faced by English teachers within the unique setting of national learning camps.

Although student-focused, Noguchi's (2019) research on the impacts of an intensive English camp on university students in Japan may provide insights into the potential effects of specialized language programs, aligning with the goals of the National Learning Camp. A research gap exists in understanding how the impact on students in the intensive English camp aligns with or differs from the impact on teachers in national learning camps.

Stegall's (2021) study delving into the lived experiences of international students in an English immersion program emphasizes the role of instructors in facilitating successful language learning, providing valuable perspectives on mentorship and guidance, crucial in the National Learning Camp's teacher-student dynamic. A research gap emerges in understanding how the role of instructors and the dynamics of mentorship may differ or align between international student programs and national learning camps.

Similarly, Pestaño et al.'s (2019) investigation into the impact of an English Camp on students provides a complementary perspective on potential benefits and improvements derived from immersive English language programs, aligning with the

National Learning Camp's objectives. However, a research gap exists in understanding whether the impact on students in the English Camp aligns with or differs from the perceived benefits for English teachers in the national learning camp.

Moreover, Chen's (2018) proposal for an intensive ESL camp curriculum offers practical insights into alternative approaches to language instruction, potentially informing the National Learning Camp's design and development of activities and curricula. A research gap emerges in understanding whether the proposed intensive ESL camp curriculum is transferable or applicable to the national learning camp context.

Another study was conducted by Mustakim et al.'s (2018) evaluating the effectiveness of an English Camp in Indonesia, although geographically distinct, focuses on enhancing speaking skills through immersive experiences, providing insights into the potential impacts of language-focused camps, paralleling the National Learning Camp's objectives. A research gap exists in exploring whether the effectiveness of the English camp in Indonesia aligns with or differs from the anticipated outcomes of the national learning camp.

Cañada Jr. et al.'s (2022) investigation into the challenges and coping strategies of English teachers in the new normal aligns directly with the National Learning Camp's context, providing specific insights into the experiences of teachers adapting to evolving educational norms. A research gap emerges in understanding whether the challenges faced in the new normal are comparable to or distinct from those encountered in the national learning camp.

The Department of Education's (2023) policy guidelines on the implementation of the National Learning Camp serve as a foundational document, outlining the official framework within which teachers navigate the challenges and opportunities of this novel educational initiative. While essential, a research gap exists in exploring how the policy guidelines translate into lived experiences for English teachers in the national learning camp, providing an understanding of the practical implications and challenges associated with policy implementation.

The collective insights inform the groundwork for understanding the challenges,

successes, and transformative experiences that may characterize the engagement of English teachers in the National Learning Camp. The multidimensional exploration of these studies enriches the research landscape, laying the foundation for the understanding of the lived experiences of English teachers in the evolving landscape of education. The identified research gaps underscore the need for further investigation to bridge existing knowledge disparities and enhance the applicability of insights to the specific context of national learning camps.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the lived experiences of Junior High School (JHS) English teachers in the National Learning Camp (NLC). Qualitative research, as defined by Polit and Beck (2017), was an in-depth and holistic exploration of phenomena through the collection of rich narrative materials. It aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of real-world problems, unlike quantitative research, which involved introducing treatments, manipulating variables, and quantifying data. Creswell (2016) also cited that qualitative research could establish patterns and themes based on the participants' viewpoints and challenges and potentially lead to a call for action. Hence, this design was well-suited for this study as it allowed the researcher to uncover the subjective experiences of participants in a camp setting, thereby providing valuable understandings for the institution to enhance the program's implementation.

Accordingly, face-to-face interviews and field notes were also utilized to provide an intimate and personal setting for participants to share their perspectives and experiences. As Creswell (2018) stated, this allowed the researcher to understand the meaning that participants attributed to their experiences. Thus, this in-depth study provided an opportunity for the researcher to unearth the deeper meanings and nuances of the participants' experiences.

3.2 Research Methodology

This study employed a phenomenological research methodology as it dwelled on the JHS English

teachers' lived experiences in the NLC. Grbich (2013) defined phenomenology as an approach focused on uncovering the hidden meanings and essences of an experience. It emphasized understanding how participants made sense of their lived experiences, aiming to explore the complex and subjective aspects that contributed to the fullness of human phenomena.

3.3 Data Gathering Methods/ Tools

The study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Interviews, as defined by Roulston (2010), were a valuable tool for developing situated accounts and different methods of speaking about research themes through a co-construction of data. Semi-structured interviews involved a predetermined set of questions that could be adapted as needed based on the interviewee's responses. This type of interview involved the developing of a general set of questions and format to follow and use with all the participants; however, the interviewer could vary the questions as the situation demanded (Lichtman, 2014). The interview guide was composed of two (2) central questions with probing questions. The first part was composed of probing questions to describe "what" the participants had experienced in terms of the phenomenon, and the second part was also probing questions to describe "how" the participants experienced it. Participants were encouraged to talk freely and tell stories using their own words or in waray - waray. The interview lasted for five (5) to ten (10) minutes and all of the interviews and observations were conducted by the researcher.

Moreover, each interview was audio-recorded with the participant's consent and was transcribed verbatim to produce a complete record of their responses. Field notes were also taken during the interviews to capture nonverbal cues, observations, and any emerging insights. The audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes served as the primary data sources for this study. Secondary data sources included NLC program documents and academic literature on English teachers' lived experiences in various educational settings. This method aligned with the purpose of the study and provided the best means of gathering rich and authentic data on the participants' experiences. The interview questions were carefully crafted and

validated by the researcher's adviser to ensure effectiveness in eliciting meaningful responses. The data collected through the interviews were thoroughly analyzed to identify common themes, patterns, and insights that contributed to a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences in the NLC program.

3.4 Brief Description of Data/ Source[s] of Data

Purposive sampling was utilized in this study. The research participants were the five (5) JHS English teachers who had undertaken the NLC at CCMSEF. The selection of participants followed a purposive approach, ensuring that the participants had direct and relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation, thus providing valuable insights into their lived experiences which, according to Etikan (2016), made them proficient and well-informed about the phenomenon of interest. The teachers' ages ranged from the twenties to almost 50, and their teaching experience varied as well. Three teachers had taught for less than 10 years, while another two had taught for almost 25 years. One participant had units in a Doctor's Program, while four had units in the Master's Program. Creswell (2013) suggested that a reasonable sample size may range from 3-25 participants for a phenomenological study, depending on the diversity of data attempting to be captured. Therefore, these five teachers were an adequate sample for this type of research. Subsequently, this study relied on a combination of primary and secondary data sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of JHS English teachers' lived experiences in the NLC. The primary data consisted of semi-structured interviews and was supplemented with detailed field notes. Complementing the primary data were secondary sources, including NLC program documents and academic literature.

3.5 Research Procedures

English teachers who had undergone the transition from traditional classrooms to the National Learning Camp were purposively selected as participants of the study. Informed consent was obtained, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their involvement and that this research was purely academic, with no risk involved in the study, and they had the liberty to withdraw at any time. Semi-

structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, involving audio-recorded conversations with participants. Simultaneously, detailed field notes were taken during interviews. This study used the five steps outlined below to analyze the gathered data. First, the researcher adopted the practice of bracketing out personal experiences to set aside any preconceived notions and maintain objectivity. Second, the researcher engaged in a dialogue with individual participants during interviews, enriching the analysis by allowing a deeper exploration of their perspectives. Third, the study involved reflective practices, including continuous reading and re-reading of collected data, and journaling thoughts, questions, and responses, as integral to the analytical process. Fourth, the identification of major themes occurred through preliminary data analysis and thematic analysis, involving organizing and categorizing data to reveal recurring patterns and essential themes within the narratives. Fifth, a critical approach was taken in questioning the data and challenging emerging assumptions, creating space for the emergence of new descriptions and conceptualizations. Additionally, it was necessary to seek validation of findings from research participants by comparing the researcher's descriptive results with their lived experiences.

IV. DISCUSSION

This part contains the detailed presentation of results and discussion as specified in this study. The detailed presentation, analysis and data have been reached as a result of interviewing the teachers of Clarendio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries who have lived experiences in the National Learning Camp.

From the data analysis, five (5) themes were mentioned to wit: (1) Adaptability to the New Setting; (2) Learning Abilities; (3) Participation & Motivation; (4) Training; and (5) Aspirations. The five themes that emerged suggested that the teachers of Clarendio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries indeed faced different kinds of experiences in which those experiences have given them key points on what to do to accomplish their mission and thrive in teaching despite of the learners' situations. A variety

of experiences helped them manage and also assisted them how to surpass the experiences amidst the adversities they have encountered. At the end of time, through those mentioned lived experiences, they have shown bravery to face all of those, and they didn't let those experiences be the reason to fail in the mission they have chosen. Thus, there is no doubt that they deserved a banquet of victory.

4.1 Theme 1: Adaptability to New Setting

In assessing the teachers' adaptability to the new setting, it is evident that a majority faced challenges during the transition. Below provides a breakdown of teachers' responses regarding their adaptability:

Teacher 2: "Well, it was quite a change from the traditional classroom especially with the number of students and their mental abilities. Adapting to the camp environment was also a bit challenging for it required a different approach in teaching the students. (*Makuri talaga kay an mga estudyante an mga magluya gud*). It's really difficult with the students who are weak. I feel like I was teaching elementary students because I really have to go back to the basics. It is not a normal classroom, it's as if bringing students into different dimension so that they could improve their abilities."

Teacher 3: "To some extent, interacting with students in a more casual and open environment felt different for me. Some do not really see the essence of why they are attending in the said camp, so I have strategized in order to get their attention and that makes it tough. What makes it challenging also is the fact that we really have to be hands-on to them."

Teacher 5: "Volunteering at the NLC proved challenging as it occurred during vacation period. Instead of embarking on a typical travel experience, I found myself confined to the school premises. Striking a balance between my personal leisure time and professional commitments became a delicate challenge during this period. (*Kauyam kay wara ak maka upod san amon bonding san akon family and friends kay adto manla ak sa eskwelahan*). It's frustrating that I wasn't able to join the bonding with my family and friends because I was just at school."

This indicates that while some teachers found the transition seamless, a significant portion faced difficulties. The reflections collectively underscore the transformative challenges faced by

teachers in the National Learning Camp (NLC). It highlights the adjustments required for varied class sizes and students' diverse mental abilities, emphasizing the unconventional nature of the NLC and its aim to enhance students' abilities. Another is it adds complexity by addressing the difficulty in capturing students' attention in a casual setting, revealing the challenges of fostering a conducive learning atmosphere outside traditional classrooms. And, it introduces personal sacrifices in volunteering during vacation, elucidating the profound impact on personal life and relationships. Overall, the narratives depict the NLC as a dynamic and challenging educational space, emphasizing adaptability, innovation, active engagement, and the delicate balance between professional commitments and personal life.

4.2 Theme 2: Learning Abilities

Another crucial aspect that surfaced during our data analysis is the theme of Learning Abilities.

Teacher 1: "Teaching students with different learning speeds was a big adjustment for me during the National Learning Camp (NLC). It felt like I was back in an elementary school setting. It was a bit tough because I usually teach Grade 10, and the NLC activities were quite basic. Some of my students even struggled with reading, and teaching them the fundamentals within the NLC timeframe was challenging. There were moments when I felt like giving up."

Teacher 4: "At first, they often forget the lessons or concepts I teach. Figuring out how to keep their attention and ensure they remember the lessons is a challenge. Sometimes, I provide snacks because some students don't bring their own, affecting their concentration."

The abovementioned statements talked about the challenges during the NLC when it comes to how students learn, which is part of Theme 2: Learning Abilities. The teachers find it hard to adjust to students who learn at different speeds, and it feels like teaching in an elementary school. The challenges increase with basic NLC activities, especially for students who struggle with reading. There are times when teachers think about giving up, showing how tough it is emotionally. Additionally, the difficulty continues as students often forget lessons, leading to

the need for creative strategies to keep their attention and help them remember.

4.3 Theme 3: Participation & Motivation

Participation & Motivation emerged as a theme shedding light on the voluntary nature of student attendance and the nature of teacher participation in the NLC.

Teacher 1: "Because students are not obligated to join the camp, many of them are absent in each session. It's quite challenging for me because when some are absent, it requires a significant adjustment on my part since others have already covered the topics, and I have to go back to catch up with those who were not present. Their motivation to attend the camp seems to be lacking, and it feels like they're only there because they have to, not because they are genuinely inspired every day."

Teacher 3: "As a teacher, I didn't have a choice because our department head selected me. Honestly, I didn't plan to volunteer; I felt compelled to do it. I wasn't eager to teach in the NLC, but when our department head picked me, I had to agree. There are times when I'd rather not attend classes due to other important tasks, but I push myself to be at school."

Teacher 5: "Even though we got leave credits and an allowance, it wasn't really sufficient. Since no one else wanted to take on the challenge, I had to agree. The allowance we received was only enough for transportation and snacks during the NLC. So, the allowance fell short. On the part of the students, others are sometimes absent because they do not have money for their fare."

In examining the theme of Participation & Motivation, a common thread emerges regarding the voluntary nature of student attendance and teacher involvement in the National Learning Camp (NLC). The challenge lies in student absenteeism, impacting the teaching approach due to the need for constant adjustments when others are absent. The lack of genuine motivation among students is noted, with attendance seeming obligatory rather than inspired. On the teacher's side, the theme reveals the involuntary nature of their participation, often chosen by department heads. Despite personal reluctance, the commitment to attend and teach at the NLC reflects a sense of obligation. Furthermore,

the insufficiency of allowances for teachers adds a financial dimension to the participation, emphasizing the sacrifices made to fulfill this educational role. The narratives collectively shed light on the intricacies of participation and motivation within the unique context of the NLC.

4.4 Theme 4: Training

Teachers expressed their concerns about the training they received.

Teacher 2: "In my perspective, I find the training provided to us to be inadequate or insufficient. By 'insufficient,' I mean that it lacked depth and thoroughness. Given the distinct phases in the camp, a more comprehensive approach with a series of training sessions is necessary, not just a singular event. The training, from my viewpoint, seemed to serve more for compliance purposes rather than adequately preparing us for the challenges of the National Learning Camp."

Teacher 4: "Just a few days before the camp started, we had our training in Tacloban. The sudden schedule surprised us, and we felt a bit unprepared. Getting money for our transportation and other training expenses was tough. We had to pay upfront, hoping to get it back later at school. The training itself wasn't enough, and it didn't cover everything we needed to know for the National Learning Camp. This made us feel even more unprepared for what was coming."

Teacher 5: "The training should teach us how to teach and what to teach. In the training, they talked about lots of ideas and theories that I don't think are useful when we're actually doing the camp. Also, the people leading the training should really know how the National Learning Camp works, so they can help us better."

The teachers express serious concerns about the training they received for the National Learning Camp (NLC). They feel the training wasn't enough and suggest that it should be more detailed, covering different parts of the camp. Instead of feeling like a helpful preparation, the training seems more like something they just have to do. The sudden schedule and financial issues for teachers attending the training make it even more challenging. They emphasize the need for the training to focus on practical things like how to teach and what to teach,

rather than just talking about theories. Also, they stress the importance of having trainers who really understand how the NLC works. The teachers' feedback shows that a more careful and thorough training plan is needed to get them ready for the various challenges of the NLC.

4.5 Theme 5: Aspirations

Despite of the hard situations that teachers from Clarencio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries have been going through, teachers instill positivity among themselves. Teachers believe that everything will be given action and attention by the Department of Education. Theme 5 discusses the idea of having a desire for better learning and for developing a sustainable curriculum wherein the competencies are attainable and suited to the needs of the learners. The following are the utterances of the key informants:

Teacher 1: "In my experience, I am thinking if the DepEd can give attention to the content of the lessons, because not all learners are fast in learning. So, I guess DepEd should give focus to translating these lessons into the language wherein our learners can understand and to use examples which are near and relevant to the experiences of the learners today."

Teacher 2: "As my personal view is concerned, the government/ DepEd should undergo further studies on how are we going to improve/enhance the new setting in our educational system such that of NLC. Another thing is that, they should go down to see personally the real problem in order to give immediate and appropriate solutions."

Teacher 4: "My very first concern in this new normal set up in education is the preparedness of teachers and students. DepEd officials did not conduct a thorough talk to all concerned in the NLC. As for me, they should see to it that in implementing such program, students and teachers must be prepared well."

V. CONCLUSION

This study looked into the experiences of Junior High School English teachers in the National Learning Camp (NLC) at Clarencio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries. The findings, based on different themes like Adaptability, Learning Abilities, Participation &

Motivation, Training, and Aspirations, provide a deep understanding of what happens in the NLC.

1. The experiences of English teachers in the NLC show the big changes they go through when moving from regular classrooms to a camp-like setup. They have to handle different class sizes, deal with students who learn at different speeds, motivate students who come voluntarily, and balance their work life with personal life. Despite the difficulties, the teachers show dedication and commitment to their unique role.

2. The theme of Learning Abilities dives into the challenges of teaching students with different learning speeds and handling basic NLC activities. The emotional stress the teachers face, even thinking about giving up, emphasizes the need for specific help and resources to teach fundamental concepts in the limited NLC timeframe.

3. Participation & Motivation focus on how students come voluntarily and teachers are selected involuntarily. Students often attend because they feel they have to, not because they want to, and teachers may feel obliged to participate. This highlights the need for a more intentional and motivating approach.

4. Training is a critical theme as teachers express concerns about the training they get. They feel it lacks depth and thoroughness, and there's a call for more practical and comprehensive training to prepare teachers better for the unique challenges of the NLC.

5. Aspirations highlight teachers' desires for a better learning environment and a curriculum that suits students' needs. They call for lessons in a language student understand, using examples relevant to their experiences. This reflects their commitment to improving education.

The abovementioned findings offer valuable understandings to enhance the NLC in the years to come. Suggestions include creating special training programs, providing targeted help for teachers dealing with different learning needs, finding ways to motivate students, and thoroughly reviewing the curriculum. Ongoing communication between teachers, policymakers, and others is crucial to address challenges and aspirations. The commitment and resilience of the teachers emphasize the need for

continuous improvement and support in innovative educational programs.

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