

Optimizing learners' participation and character building through teacher's language use in classroom interaction

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Abstract

As the Sociocultural theory conceptualizes learning as the increased participation in target language discourse, more opportunities for participation means more learning opportunities. Teacher's language use in verbal classroom interaction has been considered as significantly shaping opportunities for learners to participate (e.g. Walsh, 2002). This study thus aims to investigate five Indonesian student teachers' language use in their microteaching lessons and describe how their use of language promote or block participation. The videorecording of five lessons was transcribed following Conversation Analysis (CA) approach. The turn-taking design and sequence in the transcriptions were examined to generate the overriding interactional pattern between teacher-students. This study finds that Initiation-Response-Evaluation cycle shapes the sequential interactional pattern in the lessons, characterized with the third-turn being evaluative mostly through explicit positive assessment ('okay' or 'good'). Initiation-Response-Feedback cycle tends to promote participation where the third-turn acting to seek alternative answers, guide the direction of sequence and personalizing learners' responses. Parsing is not found for the participants' lack of eliciting skills. It is the third-turn which seems to promote or block participation for being facilitative or evaluative.

Within the Sociocultural perspective, language learning takes place in and through participation (Young & Miller, 2004). Language learning in this view is a matter of how much learners have increasingly participated in target language discourse (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000 in Waring, 2008, p.579). In classrooms, language learning mostly occurs through face-to-face classroom interaction, defined as 'verbal communication between either the teacher and the students or the students and the students during the lesson' (Dobinson, 2001, p.1). The importance of classroom interaction has to do with that classroom interaction shapes what learning opportunities the learners receive (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p.149).

Allwright & Bailey further argue that the relationship between participation in classroom interaction and learning opportunities can be seen as consequential in some ways. First, participation might determine the input provided for learning, or 'input opportunities' (p.23). Teachers might have to get learners verbally respond to the input they provide to see whether it is comprehensible. Input can also be supplied by learners themselves through the 'pushed output' which will not be otherwise generated unless learners' being involved in classroom interaction

(Swain, 1985). Next, participation determines the opportunities to practise that come out of classroom interaction, or ‘practice opportunities’, whether to practise with parts of the language or to practise language learning techniques (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p.24). Arguably, one can say that practice can happen anywhere. However, classroom can be the only opportunities some learners (like in foreign language contexts) have. It thus signifies the significance of ensuring practice opportunities can emerge from classroom interaction. Further, as language serves as both the medium and object of learning in language classrooms, participating through using the language is often desired particularly when abilities to use the language reflects one’s language proficiency. Finally, the effects of the first will affect learners’ receptivity – ‘a state of mind, whether permanent or temporary, that is open to the experience of becoming a speaker of another language, somebody else’s language (p.157). Receptivity implies the willingness to interact with the language and the culture it represents. It cannot however be measured solely by observable participation as it involves sense of involvement, engagement or attendance to teaching and learning processes, which can hardly be inferred merely from learners’ utterances. This denotes that participation can be observable (self-initiated turns and teacher-initiated turns) or unobservable (attention) (p.128).

Given the three outcomes participation brings about, getting learners to participate is crucial. Yet, the extent to which learners’ observable participation links directly to their mastery of the target language cannot, however, be explained without actually assessing their learning result and thus is not what this paper aims to. Further, learners might appear participate less because their interlanguage development may just hamper them from participating (**Selinker**,). This suggests that teachers cannot expect equal participation from different learners. Yet, to learn, learners must first get the opportunities to do so. Despite that whether or not the opportunities do make them learn needs to be further examined, they cannot possibly learn if the opportunities are not there. The main concern then is how to make learning opportunities available. This paper adopts the Sociocultural view of learning as the increased participation. This receives support from Allwright & Bailey who claim that participation makes learning opportunities available. In short, the more learners participate in verbal classroom interaction, the more the opportunities to learn and thus the more likely they are to learn.

This verbal communication is yet largely driven by teachers. Teachers authorize discussion topics, participation sequences and interaction management through their talk. Thus, teachers' talk shapes patterns of the classroom interaction and affects how and how much students can participate (Walsh, 2006, p.6). Consequently, teachers have to orient their talks to optimize opportunities for participation, and by extension, opportunities for learning. Similarly, Markee argues:

We language teaching and learning specialists should be aware that what we say and how we say it, no matter how seemingly unimportant, may turn out to have profound consequences in terms of the access our students have to good opportunities for language learning (2004, p.594).

In that regard, concerning learning opportunities that Allwright & Bailey propose, what teachers say certainly shapes the input (what type of and how much bits of the language) learners get. How teachers say what they have to say also determines the input about everybody's efforts to speak it and influences the provision of practice opportunities. However, teachers often talk too much, or teachers' talk (TT) is often inappropriate with their (stated) pedagogical purposes (e.g. to promote fluency or to focus on form) which in the end might inhibit rather than promote learners' participation (Walsh, 2002). Since the present study concerns verbal classroom interaction, it takes on the observable participation that includes self-initiated turns and teacher-initiated turns. Particularly, it is concerned with how the pattern of classroom interaction affects learners' participation and thus shapes the learning opportunities they get.

Literary review

How teacher and students interact in classroom is shaped institutionally by pedagogical goals both parties orient to (**Seedhouse, 2005**). The orientation affects how conversational features such as turn-taking organization, sequence organization and repair are realized and shape the interactional pattern in the classroom (Walsh, 2006; Wong & Waring, 2010). Central to turn-taking organization is the ubiquitous initiation-response-feedback/evaluation (IRF/E) cycle, where teachers initiate a question that should be answered by students that in turn is followed up with feedback or evaluation from the teachers (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975 & Mehan, 1979 in Hall & Walsh, 2002; Seedhouse, 2004; Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2006; Waring, 2008; Waring, 2009). IRF/E is however not the only sequential interactional pattern in language classroom. Different kinds of initiation can precede various actions and teachers' third turns can

perform different functions other than evaluation or feedback (Lee, 2007). Lee found that the third turn can also display teachers' attempts of parsing their language in order to direct learners to produce the expected responses. It can also serve as a means of steering the sequences of classroom talks into a particular direction and of intimating learners' answer to that expected by the teachers. Finally, Lee discovered that it could display teachers' understanding of certain behaviours or actions reflected in learners' speech and classroom management.

While IRE/F pattern plays a role to engage learners in activities such as a quiz game (Hellermann, 2005b), it has been criticized for narrowing learners' opportunities to participate and thus to learn. Reviewing some studies (Cazden, 1988; Barnes, 1992; Gutierrez, 1994), Hall & Walsh (2002) conclude that a rigid implementation of the cycle turns to facilitate teacher control over interaction rather than students' learning processes, discourage complex communication pattern between teacher and students, and lead to excessive TT with brief responses on learners' part. Likewise, Musumeci (1996) finds that negotiation is absent when TT is excessive and teachers' initiation takes the form of display questions or questions to which the teacher knows the answer. In addition, considering triggers for meaning negotiation as indication of learning opportunities, Nakahama, *et. al.*, (2001) claim that unstructured conversational interaction, in contrast to the strict IRF script, provides more learning opportunities for students. They argue that conversational activities elicit more opportunities to produce more complex utterances and to make use of their pragmatic knowledge and various discourse strategies, and more challenge learners personally.

As part of institutional talks, the IRE pattern exhibits 'an unequal power speech exchange system' (Markee & Kasper, 2004). Concerning this, Markee (2005) stipulates that the predesign of turns and turn types in favour of teachers, who usually initiate repairs, seem predominant in teacher-fronted classroom talks. Paying attention to the third part of the triadic dialogue, Hall & Walsh in particular differentiate IRF from IRE in terms of their users' view of teaching. They claim that users of IRE see teaching as a process of transmission, while those of IRF consider teaching as a process to achieve an inquiry-based understanding. The 'E' part also constitutes teachers' evaluation through explicit positive assessment such (EPA) as "right", "okay" or explicit negative assessment like "no", "that's not right", though negative evaluation is often avoided in language classrooms (Seedhouse, 1997).

Some studies which have investigated ways to promote IRF cycle in classroom mostly advise teachers to modify their evaluative moves to those giving feedback that will later invite further responses from learners. Walsh (2002) investigated 8 experienced EFL teachers to examine the roles of teachers' language use in creating and increasing opportunities for learning. In specific, he evaluated how teachers' 'fill in the gaps' or 'gloss over' learners utterances actually reduces learning opportunities. He found that direct error correction, content feedback, checking for confirmation, extended wait-time and scaffolding create and increase learning opportunities. In contrast, his findings show that turn completion, teacher echo, and teacher interruptions reduce learning potential.

In addition, Waring (2008) examined the relationship among IRF cycle, feedback and explicit positive statements (EPAs) in promoting learning opportunities. His study reveals that EPAs not only indicates 'case-closed' but also serves as a pre-empt for further talk or response from learners projecting that the subsequent talk as 'unnecessary and unwarranted'. His finding also implies the need to extend feedback beyond corrective function, suggesting that students' correct responses/answers can also be followed-up with inquiry or clarification. A more recent research was also conducted by Waring (2009), in which he singled out a case where a student managed to break the chained-sequence of IRE and initiated a question on her own. Scrutinizing the same database in his research mentioned before, he describes how chained IREs is hard to restructure since 'one IRE makes the next conditionally relevant'. Consequently, learners find it hard to 'break' the chain by, for instance, addressing a question.

Those studies differ in characterizing learning opportunities. Walsh (2002) explicitly adopts the conceptualization of learning as a process of negotiation of meaning that takes place through face-to-face interactions between teachers and students. He also proposes four interactional aspects (engagement, interactional adjustment, opportunities for self-expression, clarification) that characterize environment potential with learning opportunities. The aspects reflect the relationship among input, interaction and output and the need for meaning negotiation. Waring (2008 & 2009) appears to disagree with learning as negotiation of meaning which provides learners opportunities to notice the gap between the target language and their own, to receive input of higher comprehensibility, and to produce modified output (Gas & Mackey, 2006). He claims that learning is not determined by how much comprehensible input received

but by the opportunities for meaningful language actions that a situation can afford. Waring appears to see participation as ‘the more the merrier’ while Walsh particularly uses the four interactional aspects as criteria for spotting environment rich with learning opportunities.

This present study adopts the four interactional aspects Walsh proposes. In the proposed environment, one can expect longer turns or sequence, where learners extend their contribution to the ongoing sequence. The question is then how to optimize opportunities to contribute/participate and hence opportunities for learning. Allwright and Bailey, and Markee have explained how teachers use of language in classroom interaction influences learners’ opportunities to participate. The studies reviewed above examined interaction between practicing or experienced teachers and students. Relatively few studies have however investigated student teachers’ use of language in managing classroom interaction during microteaching lessons.

Microteaching is generally part of curriculum in teacher education institutes, through which student teachers are prepared. It teaches and provides them an effective way to learn about and reflect upon effective teaching practice (Bell, 2007). However, taking the same roles as teachers and students, these STs are also to perform similar teaching tasks, use similar conversational features and presumably build interactional pattern commonly found in real language classroom. Most importantly, they also have to make interactive or online decisions throughout their teaching through ‘interacting creatively between plans, student responses, and teacher improvisation’ (Freeman & Richards, 1996, in Tsang, 2004, p.164). The decisions, partly realized through their language use, also reflect their understanding of the ‘architecture’ of classroom interaction. Microteaching in Indonesian teacher-training institutes is often the only opportunities where student teachers apply what they have understood from their training. It is the understanding that they will likely continue to hold on when later they start their professional teaching. This implies the need to examine to which extent the understanding of the role of participation in creating or increasing learning opportunities is already present in their teaching performances. The result of such examination further calls for the need to make them aware of their use of language in for its potential outcomes elaborated before.

This present study is thus set to investigate the interactional pattern in microteaching lessons, and to describe how student teachers' language use in classroom interaction promotes or blocks opportunities for participation, and thus opportunities for learning. This study contributes to CA-based studies particularly those concerned with learning processes in classroom interaction. This study also enriches the scope of the studies' investigation by taking different database. The finding of this study will shed the light on how different the interactional pattern in microteaching lessons is to real classroom. This will show what Microteaching class needs to do to raise the student teachers' awareness of the relationship between participation and learning opportunities and to equip them with the required skills to optimize participation.

Methodology

The data of this present study was collected from videorecording five students who were attending the researcher's Microteaching class in 2008 and 2009. The recordings are 15 – 20 minutes long. Two students were from 2008 class and three were from 2009 class. They are 19 – 21 years old female and were generally at intermediate to upper intermediate level. Their signed consent forms are provided. Microteaching class is part of the teacher preparatory program in English Education Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The class ran for 16 weeks. At the end of the class, the students would go to different secondary schools to do their 2 months teaching practicum, where they have to teach like the English teachers at the given school do.

Following CA approach, this study employs 'unmotivated looking' data analysis (Seedhouse, 2005). It means the researcher approaches the data with an open mind and not with any preconceived ideas of what the data mean (McKay, 2006). The researcher carefully analyzes relevant conversational features including turn-taking organization and sequence of organization, to find the general interactional pattern in the data. In so doing, she attempts to reveal the ways interlocutors comprehend and respond to one another's utterances in talk-in interaction and focuses on factors that result in the sequences of action that emerge during the interaction (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 14). In this research, departing from turn as 'a stretch of speech of a single interlocutor' (Nakahama *et al.*, 2001, p.13) turn-taking is defined as 'way of constructing a turn and allocating a turn' (Wong & Waring, 2010, p.8). Sequence organization is explained as

‘the mechanism by which interactants are able to make their utterances comprehensible and by which cointeractants are able to interpret them’ (Seedhouse, 2005, p.21).

To analyze, the videorecordings will then be transcribed using CA conventions, to make the primary data available for a more intensive analytic consideration. The transcript also allows the researcher to conduct case-by-case analysis and proceeds to deviant case analysis, which ultimately leads her to generate patterns of interaction (Wong & Waring, 2010). Yet, Seedhouse (2005) warns that ‘transcripts are inevitably incomplete, selective renderings of the primary data which invariably involve a trade-off between readability and comprehensiveness’. In this study, selective transcripts are made available to justify what type of interaction typifies the microteaching lessons and to describe how each interactional work promotes or blocks opportunities for participation, and therefore opportunities for learning. Thus, this study aims to a) investigate the interactional pattern (sequence of interaction) between teacher and students in the microteaching lessons and b) describe how student teachers’ language use in classroom interaction promote or block participation.

Result and discussion

1. What is the interactional pattern in Indonesian student teachers’ microteaching lessons

Markee (2005) signals teachers’ dominance in classroom interaction their rights to assign topics, determine who speaks and when, and to assess students’ contribution. Teacher’s talk is also shown dominant in the five student teachers’ classroom interaction with Initiation-Response-Evaluation being the most frequently occurring sequential pattern in teacher-students interaction. The number of turns of teacher and student in each of the lesson is provided below to further explain how the student teachers did most of the talking in the lessons.

Table 1.
The number of turns taken by student teachers and students

No.	Findings	Nawang’s Lesson	Fifi’s lesson	Nina’s lesson	Tasya’s lesson	Nilu’s lesson
1.	Teacher’s turns	59	33	37	70	40
2.	Students’ turns	56	24	27	66	33

With 10 students in each lesson, and 1 teacher only, the students’ turn number is very small. Perhaps there was just not enough time for each student to talk in 10 to 20 minutes. Also, the performing students might have mainly focused on finishing the lesson on-time for getting

good score in time management. Yet, given teacher's turns are two third of the cycle, the dominance of IRE sequence in the classroom interaction in all the lessons making it justifiable to say that the teachers were simply taking the floors more. This is in line with Lee (2007) who used number of controlling turns in determining interlocutor's dominance in a conversation. Lee defines controlling turns as those used to elicit a particular response. Those eliciting turns actually control the conversational structure in that they decide when a topic unit starts and ends. While question often starts a topic, imperatives or statements usually mark the end of a topic which is also an indication of topic shifts. Likewise, as Markee has argued, initiation turn in IRE cycle is almost always filled by teachers who assign and thus start a topic. IRE occurs much more often than Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) as shown in Table 2. In the table, two student teachers even appeared to reflect no IRF at all in their classroom interaction while only few IRF occurrences are present in others'.

Table 2.
The number of occurrences of IRE and IRF

No.	Findings	Nawang	Fifi	Nina	Tasya	Nilu
1.	IRE	27	15	13	27	15
2.	IRF	0	3	2	0	1

With regard to IRE as the main governing sequence in the classroom interaction, the study finds that the third-turn of IRE, which is the 'E' or evaluation, serves different functions that affect the design and sequencing of turn-taking. The functions are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3.
The functions of the third turn of IRE

No.	Functions	Nawang	Fifi	Nina	Tasya	Nilu	No. of turns
1.	Third turn as EPA	21	13	15	18	13	80
2.	Third turn as teacher echo	0	2	3	14	3	22
3.	Third turn as teacher echo + EPA	3	2	8	7	2	22
4.	Third turn as implicit positive evaluation	6	0	0	0	1	7

Table 3 indicates that third-turn as explicit positive assessment (EPA) such as *'right'*, *'okay'*, *'right'*, or *'correct'* (Waring, 2008) is the most frequent function that the turn serves, with 80 number of occurrences. Third-turn where teacher repeats learners' response or his or her previous utterances (Walsh, 2006, p.67) comes as the second most frequently function. Third-turn as teacher echo occurs 22 times, far less frequently than that as EPA. Similar number is found in the occurrences of third-turn serving as both teacher echo and EPA. The function of third-turn as implicit positive evaluation means that no third-turn produced after learners' response. The number in the table thus indicates the absence of teacher's evaluative move in IRE sequences. The absence is to be understood that the previous turn is correct or acceptable and to signal learners to move to the next topic or response as demonstrated by the following extract.

Extract 1 (Nawang's lesson)

63.	T	:	what else?
64.	S3	:	large
65. →	T	:	and?
66.	S4	:	(thin)
67.	T	:	thin thi:n (.) thick (.) medium

In this extract, the student teacher was eliciting learners' responses on vocabulary representing 'size' used to describe a thing. Turn 63 shows that she wanted to receive more responses which was responded with no gap by student 3 in turn 64. The student teacher followed-up the response not with an EPA but another eliciting question *'and?'* which actually is a substitute of *'what else?'* In this way, she signals to the other students to continue giving her another response. The signal was well-received and another student gave the expected answer in turn 66. The absence of EPA as mostly found in other sequences often appears in the sequence where teacher's focus is to make learners supply the input or the targeted vocabulary. Such absence still shows evaluation in that teachers' silence indicates that there is nothing wrong with the responses and thus next turns can occur. As EPA, the implicit positive evaluation generally emerges in IRE type of sequence where learners' turn is characterized as being short (Walsh & Hall, 2002). Though occurring much less frequently, the IRF cycle is found in the data. It appears to also serve different functions as displayed by student teachers' use of feedback move. The functions of feedback-providing turns are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4.
The functions of third turn in IRF

No.	Functions	The turn number in each lesson				
		Nawang	Fifi	Nina	Tasya	Nilu
1.	Third turn to seek alternative responses	0	82,84	0	0	0
2.	Third turn as to intimate learners' response	0	86	75, 58	0	0
3.	Third turn to steer the direction of the sequence	0	44	89	0	58
Total number of turns		0	4	3	0	1

Table 4 demonstrates that only Fifi whose use of feedback in IRF pattern represents three different functions. The first function is to seek alternative responses from learners. The following extract taken from Fifi's lessons shows how she used her feedback moves to seek alternative answers. Though some responses were missing, the extract still clearly shows that Fifi used her feedback in turn 82 and continued in turn 84 to obtain different response from other learners.

Extract 2. Fifi's lesson (transcript 2)

79. T : (0.2) who'll answer number one? okay goo:d ani, (.) okay class listen to
80. her text
81. S4 : what is the invitation about? the invitation is about ()
82. → T : everybody agree with that?
83. ?S : (the text is about ())
84. → T : anyone has different answer?

2. *How does the student teachers' language use in classroom interaction promote or block opportunities for participation, and thus opportunities for learning.*

Hall & Walsh (2002) suggest that a rigid execution of IRE cycle increases teacher control over interaction rather than students' learning processes, discourages complex communication pattern between teacher and students, and leads to excessive TT with brief learners' responses. Similarly, the present study finds that IRE's dominance in the microteaching lessons mostly inhibit participation as teacher talks more. This inhabitation in particular results from various effects of the third-turn of IRE. The 'E' part often does not allow them to adjust their utterances, share their self-expressions or clarify, as demonstrated by the extract 3.

Extract 3. Tasya's lesson (Transcript 4)

36.	T	:	his eyes?
37.	S6	:	big
38.	→ T	:	big big? big

39.	S6	:	[yes]
40.	S5	:	[normal]
41.	→ T	:	e we have big and small eyes right? okay it is a big eyes (0.3)

In extract 3, Tasya aimed at eliciting learners' responses on describing the eyes of a photo of a person (displayed in the class). One student responded but his or her answer to which Tasya seemed disagreed (turn 38). Her echoing previous learner's utterance (for three times) asked for clarification, which was provided by the learner in turn 39. Yet, another student (S5) overlapped S6's utterance in turn 40. S5 in this case caught teacher's clarification seeking as an indication that the answer was not satisfying. S6 then proposed his or her own answer. Yet, turn 41 shows that Tasya did not expect 'normal' but either 'big or small' as those two words was the ones taught before. That is why she produced the utterance in turn 41. In this case, Tasya did not give S5 to clarify him/herself or adjust his/her utterance. Instead, she produced an EPA in turn 41 'okay', which signals that the topic is sufficient or complete and thus is closed for further discussion. Waring (2008) claims that the third turn often signals sequence-closing projecting case-closed that disqualifies the subsequent turns for being insignificant or unnecessary. EPA thus inhibits participation for signalling the sequence of a topic being complete or closed and thus discouraging learners for making further contribution which reduced learning opportunities.

Some attempts to promote participation, though very limited, are also found in the data. Lee's (2007) asserts that the third-turn as feedback can act as parsing, steering the sequence and intimating answers, which tend to extend learners' contribution. Extract 2 shows feedback not exactly to confirm but to seek alternative answer. Meanwhile, parsing involves a good deal of eliciting skills usually through questioning. All student teachers in the study appear to lack of this ability and thus produced no parsing turns. Initiation turn that aimed to elicit alternative answers will bring no participation since the third move was evaluative ('okay') (Extract 4).

Extract 4. Tasya's lesson (Transcript 3)

1.	→ T	:	okay this is an antique brown golden globe do you agree with his answer?
2.	Ss	:	ye:s
3.	T	:	okay yes maria maybe?
4.	S11	:	there is a beautiful (large round green park)
5.	T	:	okay there is a beautiful large round green park (.) what about it? (.) alfa?
6.			(.) do you agree with her answer?
7.	T	:	okay yes okay the last number (0.2) atin?
8.	S1	:	() he is a diligent slim friendly person

The other functions of feedback that promote participation include sequence steering. Sequence steering is demonstrated in Extract 5. In this extract, teacher's feedback (turn 58) aimed to guide student 5 to give the answer she called for, as shown by her EPA 'okay' in turn 60. Nina directed S5 to refer to the book for the answers. This further leads to another correct answer (turn 61) but unfortunately limited by teacher's apparent tendency to comment (turn 60, 62) after the student's response. The feedback does however allow the teacher to direct learners' utterance to her purpose.

Extract 5. Nina's lesson (transcript 5)

54.	T	:	okay based on this conversation, based on this conversation e:
55.			do you have do you find some expressions of asking an
56.			expression of asking a job of to someone?
57.	S5	:	in ilham's part
58. →	T	:	can you rep- can you read?
59.	S5	:	what kind of job would you like to have?
60.	T	:	okay another? another expression?
61.	S5	:	what do you want to be?
62.	T	:	ye:s exactly good another expression can you find in the text?

Conclusion

The quantitative data of the occurrences of IRE sequence in the data show that IRE mostly typifies the sequential pattern of classroom interaction in the participants' microteaching lessons. IRE is found to inhibit participation for short turn allocation on the part of learners. Further, the third-turn of IRE acting as EPA often signals a topic sequence as case-closed which discourages learners for making further contribution. IRF cycle on the other hand is potential to promote participation that results from various functions of the feedback move as asking for alternative answers, steering the sequence direction and intimating learners' responses. Opinion-eliciting questions will however not result in parsing if the third-turn is being evaluative.

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