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Women Entrepreneurship and Poverty Reduction in Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The persistent challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Anambra State, including high venture failure rates, limited job creation capacity, weak innovation outcomes, and inadequate access to critical entrepreneurial resources were the motivation for the study However. the study specifically examined the relationship between opportunity recognition and job creation; the relationship between resource mobilization and venture survival; the relationship between learning orientation and innovation impact; and the relationship between networking and venture survival in Anambra State, Nigeria. The research was anchored on Schumpeter's Innovation Theory of Entrepreneurship, the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, and Social Network Theory. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised women entrepreneurs operating in Onitsha, Nnewi, Awka, and Ekwulobia, Anambra State. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, out of the 384 questionnaires administered, 350 copies were correctly filled and found valid for analysis. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient with the aid of SPSS version 23 at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between opportunity recognition and job creation; a strong positive and significant relationship between resource mobilization and venture survival; a strong positive and significant relationship between learning orientation and innovation impact; and a positive and significant relationship between networking and venture survival. The study concluded that entrepreneurial capabilities are critical drivers of sustainable venture performance in Anambra State. It recommended that entrepreneurs, policymakers, and support institutions strengthen opportunity recognition skills, enhance access to resources, promote continuous learning, and encourage networking platforms to improve venture sustainability, innovation, and job creation.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, Poverty Reduction, Opportunity Recognition, Resource Mobilization, Learning Orientation, Networking, Anambra State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Women's entrepreneurship has gained significant momentum in the past few decades, particularly in developing economies where women's involvement in income-generating ventures has become a critical tool for household sustainability and poverty reduction. Historically, women in Africa, including Nigeria, have always engaged in

informal entrepreneurial activities such as trading, craftwork, and food processing. In the southeastern part of Nigeria, especially Anambra State, women have been known for their resilience and commercial vibrancy, contributing immensely to family income through diverse business ventures (Eze & Okonkwo, 2021; Umeh & Amah, 2021). Despite their contributions, societal, financial, and structural barriers have historically limited the scale and impact of their entrepreneurial efforts.

In recent years, national and global attention has turned toward empowering women economically through entrepreneurship development. Various policies, programs, and non-governmental initiatives have been introduced to support women entrepreneurs in terms of financing, training, and networking. In Nigeria, the establishment of schemes such as the National Women Empowerment Fund and Women's Loan Programs has aimed at providing financial access and business training to support female entrepreneurs (Olaniyan & Akinbode, 2023; Chukwu & Obi, 2022). These initiatives recognize women not only as participants in business but also as catalysts for inclusive economic growth.

Globally, the recognition of women as vital contributors to sustainable development has gained momentum, with organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union advocating for female economic empowerment. In Nigeria, women account for nearly half of the labor force, yet structural inequalities such as limited access to credit, inadequate property rights, and cultural restrictions have hindered their entrepreneurial growth (Umeh & Amah, 2021; Ugwu & Okeke, 2023). Anambra State provides a unique context for this research because of its vibrant trading culture, resilient market women, and the significant role female entrepreneurship plays in household survival and poverty alleviation.

This study examines the relationship between women entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Anambra State using four critical variables: opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, learning orientation, and networking. Opportunity recognition captures women's ability to identify viable ventures; resource mobilization assesses their capacity to acquire and utilize financial, human, and social capital; learning orientation highlights the pursuit of knowledge and adaptability to market changes; while networking emphasizes the collective and relational capital that facilitates growth. Together, these variables provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how women entrepreneurship contributes to poverty alleviation and inclusive development in Anambra State (Akinola & Akinyele, 2023; Ugochukwu & Obioma, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Women entrepreneurship should serve as a strong driver of poverty reduction and sustainable development. Across the world, female entrepreneurs are recognized as agents of economic growth, job creation, and household welfare improvement. In regions with vibrant commercial activities, such as Anambra State, women's engagement in business is expected to generate steady income, create employment opportunities, and enhance living standards for families and communities.

In reality, however, many women in Anambra State struggle to recognize viable business opportunities. A large proportion of women engage in overcrowded and low-profit activities, which limits their ability to generate sustainable income. Another pressing problem is the difficulty women face

in mobilizing resources for entrepreneurial growth, as many female entrepreneurs remain financially excluded due to inadequate access to credit, insufficient training, and lack of infrastructural support. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs in the State exhibit low levels of learning orientation, and weak entrepreneurial networking compounds the problem, restricting their visibility, resilience, and long-term success.

The central problem, therefore, is the persistent poverty among women in Anambra State despite their high level of participation in entrepreneurial activities. The gap lies in the limited empirical evidence on how specific entrepreneurial factors — opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, learning orientation, and networking — shape poverty reduction outcomes for women. This study bridges this gap by providing nuanced insights into how targeted entrepreneurial behaviors can translate into tangible poverty-reducing outcomes among women entrepreneurs in Anambra State.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this research is to examine the relationship between women entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Anambra State, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives are to:

i. Examine the relationship between opportunity recognition and job creation in Anambra State, Nigeria.
ii. Ascertain the relationship between resource mobilization and venture survival in Anambra State, Nigeria.
iii. Evaluate the relationship between learning orientation and innovation impact in Anambra State, Nigeria.
iv. Investigate the relationship between networking and venture survival in Anambra State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurship is broadly defined as the process through which women initiate, organize, and manage a business venture, often with the intention of making profit, achieving personal fulfillment, and supporting family livelihood. According to Akinola and Akinyele (2023), women's entrepreneurship refers to the economic activities led by women that involve innovation, risk-taking, and value creation within the private sector. Several scholars have identified distinct characteristics that influence women's entrepreneurial success, including opportunity recognition, access to resources, learning orientation, and network building (Nwafor & Ijeoma, 2022). Women's entrepreneurship is a dynamic and multidimensional concept that transcends mere business ownership, embodying empowerment, self-reliance, innovation, and socio-economic transformation.

Opportunity Recognition

Opportunity recognition is widely considered a foundational element in the entrepreneurial process. It refers to an entrepreneur's ability to identify viable business ideas and transform them into profitable ventures. Akinola and Akinyele (2023) describe it as the mental process through which entrepreneurs identify gaps in the market that can be converted into value-creating enterprises. Scholars have emphasized that opportunity recognition is not purely a matter of chance but a skill that can be developed (Olaniyan & Akinbode, 2023). In developing economies, especially within the African context, opportunity recognition has been linked directly to economic empowerment and poverty reduction (Nwafor & Ijeoma, 2022).

Resource Mobilization

Resource mobilization refers to the process through which individuals or organizations acquire and utilize various forms of capital —

financial, human, material, and social — to initiate, sustain, and grow business activities. Adebayo and Olamide (2021) describe it as involving both internal and external strategies to secure inputs required for productive entrepreneurial ventures. Financial resource mobilization is a critical barrier for many women in developing countries, where informal sources such as cooperative societies, rotating savings groups, and family loans have become essential alternatives (Chika & Ifeoma, 2020). Resource mobilization is closely linked to poverty reduction, as it enhances the income-generating capacity and economic independence of women (Chukwu & Obi, 2022).

Learning Orientation

Learning orientation refers to an individual's or organization's commitment to acquiring, sharing, and utilizing knowledge to improve performance and adapt to changing environments. Sinkula, Baker, and Noordewier (1997) define learning orientation as encompassing three dimensions: commitment to learning, shared vision, and open-mindedness. Eze and Nwankwo (2020) argue that women entrepreneurs who embrace learning are more likely to adapt to changes, overcome business challenges, and sustain long-term growth. Learning orientation is an essential component of entrepreneurial success and poverty alleviation, equipping women entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills required to manage their businesses effectively and innovate continuously (Ogunleye & Adeoye, 2022).

Networking

Networking in entrepreneurship refers to the process of building and leveraging relationships and connections with individuals, groups, institutions, or organizations to enhance business performance and access to resources. Akinyemi and Oduwole (2021) describe networking as a strategic activity that enables entrepreneurs to gain information, advice, support, and opportunities that may not be accessible through formal means. Olowokere and Adeola (2023) noted that networking allows female business owners to navigate challenges such as market entry, funding barriers, and low visibility. Networking is a vital entrepreneurial skill that supports the growth and sustainability of women-owned businesses, facilitating access to both tangible resources like finance and customers, and intangible benefits such as mentorship and innovation capacity (Akinola & Akinyele, 2023).

Poverty Reduction

Poverty reduction is a multifaceted concept that encompasses strategies, policies, and efforts aimed at improving the living standards of individuals and communities experiencing deprivation. World Bank (2020)**,** poverty is defined as “pronounced deprivation in well-being,” which includes lack of access to income, healthcare, education, and basic services. Adebayo and Ibrahim (2021) describe poverty reduction as the process of increasing access to resources, opportunities, and services that promote economic self-sufficiency and improve human welfare. It is not merely the absence of income but the absence of capabilities to live a decent life.

Venture Survival

Venture survival refers to the ability of a business enterprise to sustain its operations over time, overcoming internal and external challenges to remain active and competitive in the market. It is a critical component of entrepreneurial success, as a business must first survive before it can grow or scale. Okafor and Onuoha (2021), venture survival is the firm’s capacity to continue existing in its business environment while generating sufficient income to meet operational costs

and obligations. It encompasses resilience in the face of market volatility, regulatory changes, and resource limitations.

Job Creation

Job creation refers to the process through which new employment opportunities are generated within an economy, sector, or business, either through expansion, innovation, or entrepreneurial activity. According to Nwachukwu and Eze (2021), job creation is a vital economic indicator that reflects the ability of a nation or business ecosystem to absorb its labor force and reduce unemployment. Job creation plays a critical role in improving livelihoods, reducing poverty, and fostering inclusive economic growth (Akinyemi & Olowokere, 2022).

Innovation Impact

Innovation impact refers to the measurable outcomes or effects that result from the introduction and application of new ideas, processes, products, or services within an organization or society. It captures how innovation contributes to improved performance, competitiveness, economic growth, and social development. Agyapong and Adam (2021), innovation impact is the degree to which innovative activities lead to positive changes in productivity, market expansion, or customer satisfaction. Similarly, Nwachukwu and Edeh (2020) defined innovation impact as the transformation that occurs when new knowledge or technologies are successfully applied to solve problems or create value.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three theories: Schumpeter's Innovation Theory of Entrepreneurship, Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, and Social Network Theory. Schumpeter's Innovation Theory, developed by Joseph A. Schumpeter in 1934, emphasizes that entrepreneurs are agents of economic development who instigate change through the introduction of new combinations such as new products, production processes, and markets. The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, developed by Jay Barney in 1991, posits that the success and sustainability of any enterprise largely depends on the entrepreneur's ability to acquire, manage, and utilize both tangible and intangible resources effectively. The Social Network Theory, developed by Barnes in 1954 and expanded by Granovetter in 1973, centers on the idea that the structure and quality of social relationships influence individual behavior, decision-making, and economic outcomes. Together, these theories explain how opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, learning, and networking collectively drive women's entrepreneurial success and poverty reduction in Anambra State.

Empirical Review

Olatunji and Adebayo (2021) conducted a study on youth entrepreneurs in Lagos State and found that those who possessed strong opportunity recognition skills were more effective in creating jobs, particularly in ICT and informal service sectors. Their study emphasized that recognizing and acting on opportunities enables entrepreneurs to expand operations, thereby increasing labor demand. Similarly, Ayeni and Adepoju (2020) reported that agribusiness SMEs in Oyo State that proactively identified emerging market needs and adopted differentiation strategies were better positioned to generate employment within the agricultural value chain.

Abiodun and Olayemi (2021) found that entrepreneurs engaged in cooperative societies and community networks in Kwara State had better access to finance, training, and market information, which significantly improved business sustainability. Okoro and Fagbemi (2022) reported that youth-led

startups in Abuja that actively participated in informal and formal networking platforms exhibited significantly higher survival rates over a three-year period compared to non-networked enterprises.

Chung (2019) established that organizational learning significantly enhanced export performance among entrepreneurial firms in emerging markets, demonstrating that learning-based resource accumulation strengthened firms' resilience and long-term competitiveness. Obembe, Falola, and Akinbode (2021) found that learning orientation directly influenced innovation capability in agro-processing firms, thereby improving sustainability and market performance. Kwarteng, Prah, and Ackah (2020) observed that SMEs with strong learning orientation were more capable of adopting new technologies, which enhanced their adaptability and survival in competitive environments.

Mensah and Boateng (2021) emphasized that inter-firm collaborations and resource networks improve operational efficiency and reduce vulnerability to market volatility, while Ali and Hassan (2020) found that women entrepreneurs in Pakistan with broader and more diverse networks were more resilient to business shocks and more capable of sustaining their ventures.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was appropriate for gathering data from a population through structured questionnaires and allows for systematic investigation into the entrepreneurial experiences of women in Anambra State. The study was conducted in Anambra State, located in the southeastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The population comprised all women involved in entrepreneurial activities in Anambra State. According to the SMEDAN/NBS 2021 MSME Survey, the estimated population of women entrepreneurs in Anambra State is 870,000.

The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sample Size Determination Table, which recommended 384 respondents for the study population at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. A stratified random sampling technique was employed, stratifying the population according to major commercial zones: Onitsha, Nnewi, Awka, and Ekwulobia. A structured questionnaire was used as the main research instrument, designed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Content validity was ensured by experts in entrepreneurship and gender studies, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.87, indicating a high level of reliability.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to analyze demographic data, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to test the relationships between variables at a 0.05 level of significance. Out of 384 questionnaires administered, 350 copies (91.1%) were correctly filled and found valid for analysis.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic analysis revealed that 52.9% of respondents are married, while 40.0% are single and 7.1% are separated or divorced. The majority of respondents (40.0%) fall within the 31–40 years age group, indicating that the study population is largely composed of economically active adults. Most respondents (42.9%) hold a First

School Leaving Certificate, followed by OND/NCE holders (31.4%) and B.Sc/HND holders (20.0%). Trading represents the most dominant business type (47.1%), followed by services (27.1%) and manufacturing (18.6%). Most respondents (38.6%) have been in business for 1–3 years, suggesting adequate experience for meaningful entrepreneurial insights.

Hypothesis One: Opportunity Recognition and Job Creation

H_{01}: There is no positive significant relationship between opportunity recognition and job creation in Anambra State, Nigeria.

The descriptive statistics showed that a combined 78.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they can easily identify new business opportunities in their environment (Mean = 4.02, SD = 1.08). Similarly, 78.5% agreed that they have been able to employ others as a result of their business activities (Mean = 3.97, SD = 1.06). The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.541$, $p < 0.01$) between opportunity recognition and job creation. This indicates that entrepreneurs who are better at identifying and acting on business opportunities are more likely to create jobs. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected.

These results are consistent with Olatunji and Adebayo (2021), who found that youth entrepreneurs in Lagos State who possessed strong opportunity recognition skills were more effective in creating jobs, particularly in ICT and informal service sectors. Similarly, Ayeni and Adepoju (2020) reported that agribusiness SMEs in Oyo State that proactively identified emerging market needs were better positioned to generate employment. The current study confirms that opportunity recognition is a key entrepreneurial capability that translates directly into job creation, supporting both theoretical expectations and prior empirical evidence within the Nigerian and broader African context.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation between Opportunity Recognition and Job Creation

Variables	Opportunity Recognition	Job Creation
Opportunity Recognition	1	
Job Creation	.541**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	350	350

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS Version 23 (2025)*

Hypothesis Two: Resource Mobilization and Venture Survival

H_{02}: There is no positive significant relationship between resource mobilization and venture survival in Anambra State, Nigeria.

The descriptive statistics revealed that a combined 81.4% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they effectively utilize available resources to grow their businesses, recording the highest mean score (4.06) among the resource mobilization variables. For venture survival, 80.0% of respondents

acknowledged that access to training and mentorship has improved their business survival (Mean = 4.04). The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.587 ($p < 0.01$) indicates a strong positive relationship between resource mobilization and venture survival. This implies that entrepreneurs who can effectively mobilize financial, human, and material resources are more likely to sustain their ventures over time. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected.

This finding is consistent with Abiodun and Olayemi (2021), who found that entrepreneurs engaged in cooperative societies and community networks in Kwara State had better access to finance, training, and market information, which significantly improved business sustainability. It also aligns with Mensah and Boateng (2021), who emphasized that inter-firm collaborations and resource networks improve operational efficiency and reduce vulnerability to market volatility.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Resource Mobilization and Venture Survival

Variables	Resource Mobilization	Venture Survival
Resource Mobilization	1	
Venture Survival	.587**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	350	350

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS Version 23 (2025)*

Hypothesis Three: Learning Orientation and Innovation Impact

H_{03}: There is no positive significant relationship between learning orientation and innovation impact in Anambra State, Nigeria.

The descriptive statistics showed that 82.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they learn from business experiences and apply lessons to future decisions (Mean = 4.12), while 82.9% also reported actively seeking new ideas to differentiate their businesses (Mean = 4.12). The Pearson correlation analysis revealed the strongest positive relationship among all tested hypotheses ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$), signifying that learning orientation strongly associates with innovation impact among women entrepreneurs in Anambra State. This finding provides sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H_{03}).

The result aligns with Chung (2019), who established that organizational learning significantly enhanced export performance and long-term competitiveness in emerging market firms. Obembe, Falola, and Akinbode (2021) found that learning orientation directly influenced innovation capability in agro-processing firms. Olokundun, Falola, and Ibidunni (2021) similarly confirmed that SMEs with a culture of continuous learning exhibit higher innovation output, product diversification, and resilience in crisis periods.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between Learning Orientation and Innovation Impact

Variables	Learning Orientation	Innovation Impact
Learning Orientation	1	
Innovation Impact	.612**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	350	350

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS Version 23 (2025)*

Hypothesis Four: Networking and Venture Survival

H_{04}: There is no positive significant relationship between networking and venture survival in Anambra State, Nigeria.

The descriptive statistics indicated that 82.9% of respondents affirmed that networking has opened up new business opportunities for them (Mean = 4.12), while 81.5% acknowledged that access to training and mentorship has improved their business survival (Mean = 4.06). The Pearson correlation shows a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.569$, $p < 0.01$) between networking and venture survival. Entrepreneurs who maintain strong networks, mentorship ties, and business associations are more likely to sustain their ventures over time. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_{04}) is rejected.

This finding corroborates Okoro and Fagbemi (2022), who reported that youth-led startups in Abuja that actively engaged in networking platforms exhibited significantly higher survival rates than non-networked firms. Ali and Hassan (2020) also reported that women-owned enterprises with broader social capital demonstrated stronger resilience and faster recovery from business shocks. The findings further support the Social Network Theory, which views networking as a strategic mechanism for accessing scarce entrepreneurial resources in environments with weak formal institutional support.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation between Networking and Venture Survival

Variables	Networking	Venture Survival
Networking	1	
Venture Survival	.569**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

N	350	350

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS Version 23 (2026)*

Summary of Findings

This study examined the relationships between opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, learning orientation, networking, and enterprise outcomes — specifically job creation, innovation impact, and venture survival — among women entrepreneurs in Anambra State, Nigeria. A sample of 350 respondents was surveyed, and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses. The key findings are as follows:

(i) There is a strong positive and significant relationship between opportunity recognition and job creation in Anambra State, Nigeria ($r = 0.541$, $p < 0.01$).

(ii) There is a strong positive and significant relationship between resource mobilization and venture survival in Anambra State, Nigeria ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.01$).

(iii) There is a strong positive and significant relationship between learning orientation and innovation impact in Anambra State, Nigeria ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$).

(iv) There is a strong positive and significant relationship between networking and venture survival in Anambra State, Nigeria ($r = 0.569$, $p < 0.01$).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that entrepreneurial capabilities significantly relate with enterprise outcomes in Anambra State, Nigeria. Opportunity recognition enhances job creation, while effective resource mobilization and strong networking relationships contribute substantially to venture survival. In addition, learning orientation plays a critical role in improving innovation impact among entrepreneurs. The study therefore concludes that entrepreneurial success and sustainability depend not only on access to capital but also on cognitive skills, continuous learning, and social capital. Entrepreneurs who are proactive in recognizing opportunities, mobilizing resources, acquiring knowledge, and building networks are better positioned to survive, grow, and contribute meaningfully to economic development through job creation and innovation. The findings reinforce Schumpeter's Innovation Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, and Social Network Theory by demonstrating that opportunity recognition, resource capabilities, learning orientation, and networking constitute valuable entrepreneurial resources that drive sustainable venture performance and poverty reduction in Anambra State. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

(i) Entrepreneurs should actively develop opportunity recognition skills through training, market research, and environmental scanning in order to identify viable business ideas capable of generating employment.

(ii) Government agencies and financial institutions should strengthen support for resource mobilization, including access to credit, grants, and business development services, to enhance venture survival among women entrepreneurs in Anambra State.

(iii) Entrepreneurs should adopt a strong learning orientation by engaging in continuous training, skill development, and knowledge sharing to improve innovation outcomes and business competitiveness.

(iv) Entrepreneurs should participate in business networks, associations, and mentorship programs, as strong networking relationships significantly enhance venture

sustainability and poverty reduction outcomes.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes the following contributions to knowledge. Empirically, unlike previous research that focused broadly on women's entrepreneurship, this study demonstrates the combined influence of opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, learning orientation, and networking on job creation, innovation impact, and venture survival in Anambra State. Geographically, while prior studies were conducted outside Southeast Nigeria, this research provides region-specific evidence for Anambra State, enriching the Nigerian entrepreneurship literature and highlighting unique entrepreneurial dynamics in the region. Theoretically, the study validates and integrates Schumpeter's Innovation Theory of Entrepreneurship, Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, and Social Network Theory by demonstrating how these four entrepreneurial variables jointly influence poverty reduction outcomes, adding a nuanced understanding of how entrepreneurial capabilities drive sustainable enterprise performance.

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