



# Social Factors Influencing the Demand for Higher Degree Programmes among Male and Female Graduate Students in Universities in Rivers State

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## Abstract

This study examined social factors influencing the demand for higher degree programmes among males and female graduate students in universities in Rivers State. Two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses guided this study. The design of this study was descriptive. The population of this study was 5,377 postgraduate students of two public universities in Rivers State. A sample size of 612, comprising 304 male and 308 female students was drawn for the study. Test re-test was used to establish the reliability co-efficient of the instrument at 0.84. The data generated with the questionnaire was analysed using mean, standard deviation and z-test. The findings of the study revealed that unemployment exerted minor influence on the decision of graduate students to enrol for higher degree programmes. The study also revealed that social factors had high influence on the students' decision to enrol into graduate programmes. Some of the social factors that influenced graduate students enrolment in universities include; desire to improve standard of living, to gain a prestigious place in the society, find a job with high social status, meet family demands, acquire a scientific view, gain satisfactory social surrounding during university studies, and to acquire information about scientific process. This study recommended that federal and state governments should give more attention to the increasing demand for graduate programmes with a view to allocating more funds to universities to boost their effectiveness. This has become urgent, because the money provided thereof will go a long way in helping them to acquire infrastructural facilities needed to match the increases in demand.

**Keyword:** Social Factors, Influence, Demand, Higher Degree Programmes, Graduate Students, Universities, Rivers State.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education in general and higher education in particular, are fundamental for the construction of a knowledge based economy and society. University education around the world are regarded as a fountain of knowledge; where new inventions, ideas, knowledge and other discoveries takes place and imparted to learners for the growth and prosperity of the society. The demand for education generally and higher education particularly has been on the increase amid the evolving challenge of infrastructural inadequacies that show-up in consideration of quality assurance and course accreditation matters. For example, in 1980, 73,425 candidates enrolled into the nation's universities, by 1990, the enrolment figures had reached 180,871, indicating remarkable 246% increase in enrolment. The consequences was certain overstretching of existing facilities, as needed resources to procure educational installations were not adequate match the increased student enrollment due to the dwindling economic fortunes of the country then. Collapse of quality and standard of education ensued as a result of continued surge in enrolment figures without corresponding provision of educational resources to match students' population (Federal Ministry of Education, 2003).

The increasing demand for higher education in Nigeria has resulted in unusual expansion of access to higher education due to the rising number of candidates seeking university education. There are two fundamental dimensions of demand; the wishful desire and practical access to higher education. Factors influencing education demand has been classified into economic, social and non-financial standpoints. Recent studies are showing paradoxical revelations on the factors determining higher education enrolment. Haase (2011) observed that factors influencing degree programmes are individualistic rather than social. Among the factors include employment, unemployment, cognitive skills acquisition and interest on a specific profession, etc. Graduate programmes is an investment in future earning abilities; whether it is considered from the purview of personal or national perspective, the ultimate aim is to improve human capital development.

Gainful employment after university education is the dream of large numbers undergraduates in universities and other tertiary institutions around the world. This is hinged on the idea that university education is very essential for better jobs and the possibility that gainful employment will enable them to earn reasonable salary at the end of the month. The higher pay which will be used to solve life challenges, invest for future income and also to help relative. This dream and euphoria associated with it is usually thwarted by unemployment affliction, leaving its victim stranded in the labour market for long time. Unemployment is situation whereby the number of qualified people that have no job is significantly high or greater than those employed (Lanaan, 1998). This is more or less the situation in Nigeria today, where unemployment has become a national phenomenon that has certainly extended its devastating ripple effects to different facets of the society. In Rivers State, unemployment rate in 2009 was 27.9 which was quite high vis-a-vis other states such as Kebbi, Enugu, Lagos, Borno and Sokoto with 17%, 12.7%, 6.2%, 22.3% and 18.7% respectively. Rivers State was only surpassed by insurgency ravaged Yobe State with 33% (NBS, 2010). The rising unemployment cannot be unconnected with mass migration of young prospective job seekers from neighbouring towns and states into Port Harcourt city, where hope of gaining employment in some of the already stressed multinational oil companies operating in the state is high, thereby adding to the increasing labour market figures in the city.

Unemployment can be more problematic and potentially dangerous especially when great number of citizens is unemployed after university education. The challenge of unemployment cut-across all divide. Nigeria has large stock of unemployed secondary school leavers, first degree, second degree and even PhD holders. Unemployed graduates have no means of livelihood; in other words, they do not contribute to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), they rather rely on their parents or relatives for subsistence. Nigeria economy is at the forefront of biggest economies in Africa. According to NBS (2012) report, these positive economic indicators have not manifested in job creation. The report further approximates that Nigeria population grew by 3.2% in 2011, in the same 2011, unemployment rose to 23.9% against 21.1% in 2010. Governments at various levels have been making efforts in different forms to curb the pandemic problem of unemployment. Such efforts include indigenization policy, industrialization friendly policies and open market approaches, while direct efforts include creation of National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Sure-p programme, You-Win Presidential programme, N-power, etc. At State level, the Rivers State Government over the years, having knowledged the challenge of unemployment in the state, has being making efforts to reduce unemployment. For instance the government employed 13,000 teachers in 2013, and present ongoing employment in various tertiary educational institutions in the state. Granted that these efforts are helping to reduce unemployment, however the growing rate of unemployment in the diminishes whatever government effort may have achieved, as the perennial unemployment rate remains high in Rivers State (25.5%) NBS (2010). This highlights that government alone cannot employed everyone, but it can provide economic infrastructures such as electricity supply, good road network and security among the facilities, including economic and financial policies that can directly empower the private sector to generate employment for the university graduates.

The dynamics of labour market in Nigeria is apparently not rosy to many graduates who throng the state capital (Port Harcourt) to look for means of livelihood. This is compounded by unusual demand for higher qualifications by employers who hardly pay commensurately to such qualifications. This unfortunate situation may have tactily many to go for higher degrees in order to meet-up job qualifications demanded by employers. Obumneme (2015) opined the large numbers of post-graduates students are fresh graduates, noting that substantial numbers of them are not gainfully employed. It appears that some of them are upgrading their skills, knowledge and abilities in order to remain competitive in the already inundated labour market. However, for those who are already working, the acquisition of higher education and professional skills will elevate their work performance abilities and effectively help them to leverage on economic and social opportunities and benefits arising thereof. Nasrin (2009) concluded that the rising unemployment rate was pushing up students' enrolment in higher education institutions in many countries.

Okafor (2011) declared that high rate of unemployment can be blamed on non-existence of properly planned job creation strategy and proliferation of courses that hardly has immediate relevance to development of the country. The result is that graduates of such irrelevant courses have to look for a way to remedy their career misadventure. Some of the unemployed people often decide to enrol for graduate programmes to enable them to specialize and sharpen their skills to increase their chances of getting meaningful employment or self-employment. This speaks volume of dysfunction and inefficiencies in the management of nation's tertiary institutions. During 1970s in Nigeria, a university degree is a ticket for blissful future, however gone is those days. This is because, population increases has manifested in increased student enrolment, resulting in disproportionate growth in graduate output and absorptive capacity of the

the Nigeria economy. This is worsened by yearly addition of 1.8 million young job seekers into the labour market (NPC, 2013). Akanmu (2011) asserted that despite the reported economic growth rate of 7% for ten years now, paid jobs is estimated to have shrunk by about 30%. The scholar further stressed that the seeming economic prosperity of Nigeria has not manifested in employment creation.

It is important to notice that the activities of multinational oil companies and militancy in the Niger Delta have contributed to devastating oil spillages in the state. With damaging impacts on farm lands and fishing waters, oil spills has made the primary economic activities in many communities in the Niger Delta quite unattractive. The result is that many youths have turned to white collar job seekers. A state that is producing unemployable graduates is invariably headed for prolonged economic, social and political upheaval. This is because unsuccessful search for job may cause some of these graduates to be susceptible to crime and prostitution.

Apart from the intrinsic values offered by higher degrees programmes, including prestige, self-fulfilment and self-actualization, the desire to acquire higher education transcends intrinsic values and extends to extrinsic benefits. Education pays (2003) argued that adults with higher education are more likely to undertake volunteer work such as sensitizing communities on dangers of stigmatizing people living with HIV/AIDS, voter-education, and self-sponsored research work to generate solutions to social ills. Higher education also helps to mould peoples lives, by improving their way of thinking, behaviours and lifestyle, thereby helping people to live healthy life, eat healthy food, and effectively reduce medical costs. Mothers who had higher education are likely to pay more attention to their children's' activities. In other words, higher education not only enhances civic participation and social cohesion, but also reduces poverty and crimes.

Higher education enhances social capital; highly educated persons are more likely to be the source of ideas that can fast-track the development of the society. They are more positioned to interact informatively in social settings and social media/networks to educate the populace on wide-ranging issues bordering on political, economic, and social issues in the society. They also enlighten members of the public on health, psychological and environmental matters as the relate well-being of the communities (Feinstein, et al., 2008). Bynner et al (2003) observed that higher education refines understanding of people on issues related to race, ethnicity, diversity and the need for tolerance, acceptance, love and social cohesion. Hence, the desire to understand the world could be a motivation to acquire higher education in humanities.

Existing related literatures have lend their support to the idea that people with higher level of education live healthier and longer lives, than less-educated persons, and likely to depend less on government funded welfare schemes. Wong et al (2002) study found out that higher learning increase the feeling of wellbeing and increase sense of control of one's life. This helps to improve mental health, cognitive functioning and right-decision-making. In other words, individuals aspire for higher degrees to enhance their overall well-being. Igbozuruike and Ukaigwe (2019) remarked that higher education has a lot of spill-over effects on the life of the receiver and the society, having noted that higher degrees play important role in raising recipients socioeconomic stability and emotional security. Ebong (2006) opined that higher education inculcates precious virtues ranging from esteemed moral values, social ethics, self-discipline and intelligence required to succeed in social life. These constitute human capital development in essence and often treated generically as knowledge considered necessary for individual functioning in the society.

Experts said that it is difficult to evaluate accurately, the returns on investment in education because a lot of social benefits inherent in education, including externalities cannot be absolutely factored and quantified correctly. Having said that, education is generally beneficial since one cannot convincingly argue that he/she incurred a loss on investment in education. Even unemployed university graduates enjoy non-financial personal rewards. Returns in education could be immediate or later in the life of the recipient. As for social return, the society should rather view or evaluate education investment returns from a long gestation perspective. The social returns to education are the most difficult to calculate; it can only be approximated by experts in educational planning. Normally, during appraisal of education production function, figures are needed in order to make good analysis, and in most cases education externalities can only be approximated as estimates are usually imprecise (Pritchett & Deon, 1999).

The benefits of developing human capital have been highlighted extensively, however it is pertinent to point out that female education is education for the nation. Female education reflects and replicates more rapidly on the family and the society - impacting positively on child up-bringing practices, home management, and home-training children about social ethics and engagements etiquettes. Tinuke (2011) opined that children and households of educated women stand to gain massively through higher education of family members. The scholar argued that a highly educated woman will discharge her responsibility at home and in the society with intelligence and excellence. She further said that educated women will ensure that their homes are delightful, and also ensure that their children are well-educated and well-behaved while supporting their husbands to manage their homes.

Access to higher degree programmes is legally equal for both genders in Nigeria, meaning that both males and females can climb any height of educational ladder irrespective of sex. Studies and observations have shown that education has potential to break gender, racial and social barriers. Being an instrument of freedom, many women have been using it to break loose from restrictions imposed by cultural, religious and social precepts. When women are educated, they are generally emancipated and empowered to perform leadership roles and impact on the community. This study examined unemployment and social factors influence on the demand for postgraduate programmes among male and female graduate students in Rivers State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The reality of unemployment among university graduates in Nigeria has been established. However, in the midst of the prevailing unemployment condition among graduates of all levels of education in the nation, many unemployed first degree graduates are seeking for post-graduate admissions in various universities. The pursuit of education at post-graduate degree level is desirable when the individual concerned is aware of the demands of higher degree programmes, and the benefits associated with them. It appears that different factors such as unemployment, socio-economic and institutional variables tend to influence the demand for postgraduate programmes. The researcher is bothered whether the rising level of graduate unemployment and social factors are contributing to rising demand for higher degree programmes among males and female candidates.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the influence of unemployment on the demand for graduate programme among male and female graduate students?
- What is the influence of social factors on the demand for higher degree programme among male and female graduate students?

## **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guided the study:

- There is no significant different between the mean assessment of male and female students on the influence of unemployment on the demand for graduate programmes in universities in Rivers State.
- There is no significant different between the mean assessment of male and female students on the influence of social factors on the demand for graduate programmes in universities in Rivers State.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study design of this study was descriptive. The population of the study was the postgraduate students of two public universities in Rivers State, namely University of Port Harcourt (UPH) and Rivers State University (RSU). The element of the population constituted the 5,377 post-graduate full-time students that enrolled for 2019/2020 academic section. A sample size of 612, comprising 304 male and 308 female students was drawn from the population; 312 male and female postgraduate students were drawn from UPH, while 300 male and female students were drawn from RSU, representing 11% of the population which is in line with Yamane (1967) criteria for sample selection. The researcher adopted proportionate multi-stage sampling technique, such that each of the universities' faculties was properly represented. The instrument used in data collection was 17-item survey questionnaires titled "Post-graduate Enrolment Motives Assessment Questionnaire" (PEMAQ). It was divided into two sections, namely, Section A and Section B. Section A contained items seeking data on demographic variables of the respondents, while section B contained items assessing the two variables investigated in this study. Test re-test was used to establish the reliability co-efficient of the instrument at 0.84. The modified four-point Likert-type rating scale of Great extent (4 points), High extent (3 points), Minor extent (2 points) and Not at all (1 point) was used to code responses. The research questions were answered using simple mean and aggregate mean statistics, while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level using the z-test.

## **RESULTS**

**Research Question 1:** What is the influence of unemployment on the demand for graduate programme among male and female graduate students?

Table 1: Mean and Means-set of the respondent's assessment of influence of unemployment variables on demand for graduate programme

S/N	Unemployment variables	Mean			Remarks
		Female	Male	Mean-set	
1.	Basically due to lack of job.	2.04	1.64	2	Minor Extent
2.	Partly due to lack of job.	1.69	1.65	2	Minor Extent
3.	I searched for job years before I decided to enrol for postgraduate programme.	1.97	1.34	2	Minor Extent
4.	To get a job with better condition	3.33	2.89	3	High Extent
5.	To avoid idleness	2.39	1.68	2	Minor Extent
6.	To widen my job opportunities.	3.13	3.19	3	High Extent
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>		<b>2.42</b>	<b>2.07</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Minor Extent</b>

In the table 1 below, the responses of the respondents on the extent 'lack of job' influenced their decision for enrolling for graduate programme shows a mean of 2.04 for female and 1.64 for male respectively in item 1. The mean-set of the two means is 2 points. This shows that 'lack of job' had minor influence on the respondents' decisions to enrol for graduate programme, though the difference in the means highlights variability in the degrees to which unemployment influenced the two genders. The desire to 'get a job with better working condition' and 'to widen job opportunities' had significant influence on all the respondents as shown in table 4.2. Items number four and six yielded weighted means of 3.33 and 3.13 for female and 2.89 and 3.19 for male respectively. The respective means-set of the two items above showed that desire to 'get a job with better working condition' and 'to widen job opportunities had high influence the motives on the respondents to seek for graduate studies. This implies that the desire for jobs that affords better working condition (such as job security, incentive welfare packages and opportunity to grow in career) positively influenced graduate students enrolment decisions given the means-set 3 points. The desire to 'avoid idleness' moderately influenced the female folks, given the weighted mean score of 2.39; the mean score of male respondents for the said item was ascertained at 1.68, which is lower than that obtained under female column. The means-set shows that the desire to avoid idleness had minor influence on the respondents, given that the aggregate mean-set is 2 points, this shows that the influence of unemployment on the demand for graduate students was minor.

**Research Question 2:** What is the influence of social factors on the demand for higher degree programme among male and female graduate students?

Table 2: Mean and means-set of the respondent's assessment of the influence of social variables on demand for graduate programmes

S/N	Social variables	Mean			Remarks
		Female	Male	Mean-set	
7.	To be able to increase my standard of living.	3.67	3.26	3	High Extent
8.	To be able to gain a prestigious place in the society	3.34	3.06	3	High Extent
9.	To be able to find a job with a high social status.	3.25	2.67	3	High Extent
10.	To experience a satisfactory social surrounding during the time I am in the university.	2.47	2.24	2	Minor Extent
11.	To be able to meet my family demands.	2.74	2.82	3	High Extent
12.	To be able to acquire a scientific view.	2.59	2.72	3	High Extent

13.	To be able to acquire information about scientific process.	2.53	2.70	3	High Extent
14.	To be able to broaden my knowledge of the world.	3.50	3.11	3	High Extent
15.	To be comparable with my peers	2.44	2.78	3	High Extent
16.	To improve my social status in the society	3.00	3.17	3	High Extent
17.	So that I can be regarded in the society	2.73	2.57	3	High Extent
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>		<b>2.93</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>High Extent</b>

As shown in table 2 above, items 7 and 11 yielded mean scores of 3.67 and 2.74 for female and 3.26 and 2.82 for male respectively, the items specifically sought to know the extent the desired for a better ‘standard of living’ and ‘to meet family demands’ influenced graduate students’ enrolment. This result shows that the respective influences of the said social variables were comparatively more prominent among female respondents than the male respondents. The mean-sets determined at 3 points affirms that ‘better living standard’ and ‘to meet family demands’ had high influence on the decision of graduate students to enrol for higher degree programme. Their enrolment was further influenced by social factors such as the desire to ‘gain prestigious place in the society’ (female =3.34; male =3.26), to get ‘a job with high social status’ (female=3.25; male= 2.67), and to ‘improve their social status’ (female: 3:00, male: 3:17) as shown in items 8, 9 and 16 respectively. All the itemized social factors except item 4 exerted high influences on the enrolment decision of the graduate students. The said item 10 yielded mean scores of 2.47 and 2.24 for female and male respondents respectively, and thus implies that the desire ‘to experience social environment of university’ had minor influence on the respondents’ decisions to sign-up for higher degree programme. In items 12, 13 and 14, the female and male respondents were united on their responses, though at varying degrees, that their decisions to enrol for graduate programmes were driven by desire to ‘acquire scientific view’ (female: 2.59, male: 2.72), ‘acquire information about scientific processes’ (female: 2.53, male: 2.70) and to ‘broaden their knowledge of the world’ (female: 3.50, male: 3.11). The mean-sets of the above items were ascertained at 3 points, indicating that the items had high influence on the decisions of the graduate students to enrol for the graduate programme. This further affirms that social factors rank high among the factors that influenced the demand for graduate programme among the students.

### Test of Hypotheses

**Ho2:** There is no significant different between the mean assessment of male and female students on the influence of unemployment on the demand for graduate programmes in universities in Rivers State.

Table 3: z-test of the difference between male and female graduate students in the influence of unemployment on demand for graduate programme

S/N	Respondents	N	Mean	SD	z-value	2-tailed	Sig. level	Remark
1.	Female	296	2.42	0.66	5.2014	.000	0.05	Significant
2.	Male	294	2.07	0.77				(H <sub>0</sub> rejected)

As shown in table 3 above, the comparison of the variables (male and female) yielded a z-value of 5.2014 which is significant at .000 level. Since this significant level of .000 is lower than the alpha level of 0.05, the above stated null hypothesis was rejected. A close look at the two means



in table 3 shows that female aggregate mean was 2.42, which is higher than that of males (2.07). This implies that the influence of unemployment on the demand for graduate programme was higher among the female than the male graduate students.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant different between the mean assessment of male and female students on the influence of social factors on the demand for graduate programmes in universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: z-test of the difference between male and female graduate students in the influence of social factors on demand for graduate programme

S/N	Respondents	N	Mean	SD	z-value	2-tailed	Sig. level	Remark
1.	Female	296	2.95	0.44	3.87	.000	0.05	Significant
2.	Male	294	2.83	0.30				(H <sub>0</sub> rejected)

In table 4 above, the comparison of the mean aggregate of female respondents (2.95) and that of male respondents (2.83) on the extent social factors influenced their decision to enrol for post-graduate programme yielded a z-value of 3.84. The two-tailed significance level for this test was .000 and less than 0.05. This result is significantly difference; hence the null hypothesis stated above was rejected. This implies that social factors had greater influence on female postgraduates than their male counterparts in respect of their demand for postgraduate programmes.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Influence of Unemployment on the Demand for Graduate Programme among Male and Female Graduate Students

This study reveals that unemployment exerted minor influence on the decision of graduate students to enrol for higher degree programme. This implies that unemployment is a causative factor that motivated graduate students to enrol for graduate programme in Rivers State. This finding is based on the computed averages of the questionnaires items. It was found out that the desire to get a job with better working condition and to widen job opportunities were the factors that influenced the demand for graduate programmes to a high extent. Lack of job on the part of graduate students and to avoid idleness were the minor reasons found to have influenced the demand for graduate programmes in Rivers State. These findings are consistent with Okafor (2011), who reported that lack of job was among the factors driving up the demand for higher degrees programmes. This is tandem with the findings of this study, because a significant different was found between the male and female students on the extent unemployment influenced their decision to enrol for graduate programme; unemployment influenced the decision of female students more than their male counterparts.

Obumneme (2015) reported that the factors that impeded graduate employment included inadequate public and private sector investment in job creation schemes and industries, skill mismatch in the labour market and defective man-power planning and policy inconsistencies. Agabi and Igbozuruike (2020) suggested some strategies unemployed graduates can use to cope with their joblessness, some of which include engaging in wealth creation activities, volunteer services and apprenticeship scheme and engaging leisure activities. People usually focus on their

job and businesses when economic activity is booming. However, when economic activities slow down, people tend to seek for more knowledge to improve their competence and to sharpen their skills by enrolling into higher degree programmes to undertake specialized courses.

### **Influence of Social Factors on the Demand for Higher Degree Programme among Male and Female Graduate Students**

This study revealed that social factors influenced graduate students' enrolments. Social factors had high influence on the students' decision to enrol into graduate programme. Some of the social factors that influenced graduate students enrolment in universities were desire to increase standard of living, gain a prestigious place in the society, find a job with high social status, gain satisfactory social surrounding during university studies, meet family demands, acquire a scientific view, and to acquire information about scientific process. Other reasons found to have motivated post-graduate students included desire to broaden their knowledge of the world, become comparable with peers, improve social status in the society and to become regarded in the society. These findings are consistent with Becker, (2009), who remarked that individuals derive pleasure and happiness from social recognition and prestige associated with university education, adding that respect, honour and prestige that comes with higher degrees accord holders of such degrees social status and recognition in the society that ultimately helps them to have good self-esteem, sense of fulfilment in life and other externalities. This study also showed that a significant difference exists between male and female graduate students on the extent social factors influenced them to enrol into graduate programme. This finding is consistent with Gong, Cassells and Keegan (2011), who said that postgraduates derive joy and happiness from rendering voluntary social services to the community. Higher degree is known to afford some sense of accomplishment and associated social recognition. All these social factors are sources of motivation to enrol for postgraduate programme.

### **CONCLUSION**

On the basis of results and findings, this study concludes that the decision to go for higher degree programme among graduate students is significantly based on social reasons. Unemployment constituted a minor reason motivating unemployed graduates to enrol for higher degree programmes. This suggests that higher degree programme is profitable, and acquisition of higher degrees gives people satisfaction.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were suggested:

- The federal and state governments should pay more attention to the increasing demand for graduate programmes with a view to allocating more funds to universities. This has become urgent, because the money provided thereof will go a long way in helping them to acquire infrastructural facilities needed to match the increases in demand.
- Universities should enrich and diversify graduate programmes to make them more functional so that graduates of higher degree programmes can be more marketable in the labour market, and entrepreneurially useful to the society.

- Government and private organization should partner with universities in areas of curriculum development and modification with a view to incorporating emerging occupational area and challenges at work environment as study areas.

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