




Research Article

Managing Academic Research Output through ResearchGate: Evidence from Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract: The reputation of academic excellence is earned by universities because of the commitment of lecturers to exceptional teaching, learning, research and professional updating. Professional updating by lecturers is assessed by the quality and quantity of their research output. This work therefore examines the role of ResearchGate in the research output of lecturers in federal universities in the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, using structured and validated questionnaire for data collection. The sample size of the study was 576 Lecturers, drawn from the six federal universities in the South-South of Nigeria. Simple random and proportionate sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. A research question was formulated to guide the analysis of data which was done using mean values. The study findings show that ResearchGate do positively impact on and does have significant influence on the research output of the lecturers. Data collected were computed and analysed using simple percentages, frequency tables, and mean values. Based the findings, this study concludes that ResearchGate is replete with resources, tools and features that facilitate research, enhance quality research output as well as academic visibility. It is therefore recommended that lecturers should sustain its usage, get more acquainted with its tools and features in order to achieve quality research output.

Keywords: ResearchGate; research output; lecturers; Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria

1. Introduction

Universities thrive in society as communities dedicated to learning and the personal development of their members. One of their major purposes is “the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad and advanced knowledge base” (Watson, 2007; Bergan & Damian, 2010). In its “research engine theory” of the role of universities in society, Hamann and Kosmützky (2021) assert that universities are creators, testers, and sites for the evaluation and application of knowledge. This is so stated because universities are preoccupied with basic research as well as those that focus on applications. In essence, universities qualify, and are deserving of this description when they function and operate as “research-led intensive institutions” (Maassen et al., 2019; Akai, 2023).

Furthermore, lecturers are well aware of this because their academic visibility and personal growth on the job is ‘hinged’ to their research output. Beyond this, the lecturers’ job responsibilities clearly identify and include embarking on research studies regularly as research reports are highly valued in the academia (Tom & Ndaeyo, 2024). Therefore, to keep pace with their job responsibility demands, lecturers explore and utilize necessary and professionally acceptable means to remain relevant within the system by deploying available resources to assist them and ease the process of research. This is what makes ResearchGate a veritable platform for lecturers and research scholars. It has potentials for connecting the lecturers with other scholars and keeping them abreast with new and latest developments in their various fields of specialization and areas of research interest.

ResearchGate is an intellectual networking website created and designed for researchers, academicians and scientists. Its major competitors include Academia.edu, Google Scholar, Mendeley as well as Semantic Scholar, amongst others (Mathews, 2016). It is known to have helped millions of researchers in sharing their research works/studies and has also been rated

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the 'largest' new media academic social network in terms of "active usage by researchers" (Van Noorden, 2014; Mathews, 2016). However, as of 2016 Academia.edu reportedly had more "registered users" (about 34 million) and "higher web traffic" than ResearchGate (Kisilowska-Szurmińska et al., 2022). Despite this, ResearchGate remains a viable, veritable and formidable force as far as research and scholarship is concerned. It presently provides access to over 160 million publication pages as well as connection with over 25 million researchers; and it 'boasts' of over 2.3 billion citations (Fajoye et al., 2023).

One distinctive feature of ResearchGate is its "question submission-and-response knowledgebase" which allows members to pose, respond to, and track questions regarding research and other topics of interests. Through this process, registered members on the site can follow other researchers and their work, identify colleagues and co-workers, and share details of current and ongoing research projects (Van Noorden, 2014). In essence, ResearchGate allows everyone to share their research publications, data, projects, and preprints with millions of other researchers; get connected with research experts, colleagues, co-authors, and collaborate at all times. It also provides an avenue for finding out who is reading or citing ones' research work; ask questions and get the right answers to solve research problems; share updates about ongoing projects; and keep abreast with latest research studies.

The exceptional teaching, research and service environment which earn universities the reputation of academic excellence is created and maintained primarily by the academics, in other words lecturers. The lecturers achieve this through their commitment to professional updating which is assessed by the quality and quantity of their research output. Research output is therefore particularly important within the academia. Besides, Borg (2013) opines that good teaching cannot be possible without research, as research remains an essential aspect of assessment for academic positions and promotions. Also, Chiemekwe, Longe, Longe, and Shaib (2009) and Akai (2023) maintain that quality research output is of utmost importance within the university environment as it is a major criterion used for "ranking world-class Universities." University lecturers are aware of all these. Hence, as part of their duties and job responsibility, they embark on research on regular basis. In the light of this, it behoves lecturers to discover and avail themselves to applications, platforms, networking sites, web-based research tools, and software programmes that have the potentials to facilitate research and enhance quality research output. Within this purview are those considered intellectual networking sites; they include ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Mendeley, Academia.edu, Semantic Scholar, amongst others. Against this backdrop, this study examines the role of ResearchGate on research, and its influence on the research output of lecturers in federal universities in South-South of Nigeria.

Taking this into consideration, the objective of this study is to examine the impact of ResearchGate on research, and its influence on the research output of lecturers in federal universities in the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Universities have been adjudged global institutions. Maassen, Andreadakis, Gulbrandsen, and Stensaker (2019) particularly state that the university is an "ultimate global institution." Among the reasons adduced for this position are: the global nature of knowledge on itself; the ever-intensifying global research connections; the impacts of the growing use of ICT in education; and the emergence of global alliances among universities. The authors are not alone on this as many other scholars and educators equally subscribe to this notion; they include Watson (2007), Bergan and Damian (2010), Borg (2013) and Akai (2023), amongst many others.

As the global institutions that they are, the main functions of universities in the society are predominantly two-fold. First, they exist primarily as "educational establishments" that are dedicated to learning and the personal development of their members. In this context, universities provide what constitute "the core of a substantial output of skilled, educated, independent, self-directed citizens" in the society, as observed by Professor Eric Thomas, former Vice Chancellor, University of Bristol.

Second, they are "research institutions." In essence, they are creators, testers, and sites for the evaluation and application of knowledge and technology. Viewed in this perspective, Professor Michael Arthur, one-time Vice Chancellor, University of Leeds, opines that universities are research-led intensive institutions; that they provide new knowledge that change paradigms, aid the human society as it evolves and in meeting new challenges as they occur. This in turn leads to innovations that subsequently have positive impact on society

(Watson, 2007; Maassen, et al, 2019; Akai, 2023).

Whether viewed purely as educational establishments or as research institutions, universities are certainly making significant contributions to the human society. In this wise, their role in the society is defined and facilitated by the academics (Uford et al., 2022; Ndayo et al., 2025), especially the lecturers. This position subsists because university lecturers design and develop curricula and lesson plans; they create and deliver course materials; engage with students, and conduct research and field work, among other responsibilities (Akai, 2023).

Akai (2023:37) expatiates on the role of lecturers in the symbiotic relation between universities and the society thus: *Lecturers provide both intellectual and moral stewardship in the universities as they are involved in the process of developing the human mind and capacity. They are the main players in the role of the universities in ensuring social cohesion in the society. They contribute significantly in building the confident and intelligent citizens that eventually mature into taking up responsibilities of leadership in the society - in governance and politics, economy, industry and technology, medicine and health, and indeed, in all sectors of the national life.*

However, these would not be possible without robust research engagements by the lecturers. As Borg (2013) notes, good teaching is not possible without research engagement. The reason is that research output is an essential aspect of assessment for academic positions and promotions, and remains the major known means for disseminating, publishing, presenting, communicating, or the pathway through which scholars make research studies and findings (discoveries) available to others (Moher et al., 2018; Akai, 2023).

In the light of all these, lecturers are constantly engaged in investigative studies, primarily for the development of new knowledge and in order to be on the cutting edge of innovation and new ideas (Akpan-Atata et al., 2015; Akpan-Atata et al., 2024; Charles & Uford, 2023). But in doing so, the lecturers also achieve and maintain academic visibility which qualifies them for promotions and progression within the academia, in line with the well familiar maxim: “publish or perish.”

The import of all these is that quality research output is a major defining factor in the life and career of university lecturers. Hence, they explore, discover and exploit available channels, resources, applications, software programmes, etc. that can facilitate the process of research as well as enhance quality research output. This is what makes ResearchGate a well sought-after imperative among lecturers.

ResearchGate as already stated in the introductory part of this study, is a new media academic tool that serves as an intellectual networking platform that caters for the scholarly needs of researchers, academicians, and scientists. It is known to have helped millions of researchers in sharing their research work with others; in asking questions about their doubts directly to domain experts; and in connecting and collaborating with colleagues, co-authors, and research experts globally. It was created and launched in May 2008 by two physicians and a computer scientist, Ijad Madisch, Sören Hofmayer, and Horst Fickenscher respectively. It started in Boston, Massachusetts, USA and later moved to Berlin, Germany in 2010. Its stated mission is: “to connect the world of Science and make research open to all”.

Since its inception and all through the years of its existence, ResearchGate have recorded continuous growth in its scientific collaboration, via Questions and Answers, peer-reviewed content, and collaboration on all areas of research. It is said to have over 25 million registered members as of September, 2023. In 2018 ResearchGate was proclaimed as an instrument that supported and influenced the behaviour of researchers globally (Gupta, 2018). On this, ResearchGate has made researchers to see and appreciate the value of sharing their work early in the research cycle. They have also reaped the value of collaboration and getting feedback and input from their peers across the globe.

In addition, ResearchGate reported that it has helped researchers to share their work more openly online. This, the report claims, have led to many possibilities for the researchers as it has not only facilitated research and collaboration among researchers but that its members are also leading in this regard hence its continuous growth (Fajoye et al., 2023).

On the impact of ResearchGate on research output, a review of a couple of studies will suffice. Accordingly, a study by Chakraborty (2012) investigated the activities and reasons for using ResearchGate by research scholars in North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India. The study adopted a survey research design and used questionnaire as instrument for data collection. One of its major findings was that ResearchGate was used for education and research, especially by scholars from the social science background.

In another study carried out by Thelwall and Kousha (2015), disseminating, communicating, and measuring scholarship in ResearchGate was the focus. The study was a content analysis, using an electronic search process known as “crawl” to access and download



data. The researchers observed that though ResearchGate is considered a “large multidisciplinary academic social web site” aimed at helping academics to connect with each other and to publicize their work, little was known about the ‘age’ and ‘discipline’ of the articles uploaded and viewed in the site (Fajoye et al., 2023). Accordingly, the study findings revealed that ResearchGate is dominated by recent (current) articles, and they attract about three times as many views as older articles. Also, that ResearchGate seems to have a wide coverage of articles from different disciplines and the years. Furthermore, that ResearchGate has uneven coverage of scholarship, with the arts and humanities, health professions, and decision sciences poorly represented.

Furthermore, and more importantly, that ResearchGate tends to have a wider audience view than other scholarly platforms as articles uploaded to the site and audience view counts indicate. The researchers then concluded that ResearchGate viewing figures are not artificially inflated, as article views on the site have low to moderate correlations with both Scopus citations and Mendeley readers, indicating that they are related to scholarly impact though the relationship is not close. Also, that articles in all disciplines in ResearchGate attract at least half as many views as articles from the most viewed disciplines as such there is no reason for scholars in any particular discipline to avoid ResearchGate. Finally, that it is plausible that ResearchGate views of articles could reflect their wider readership better than can other scholarly platforms reader counts, which would make them the best current publicly available readership indicator.

In yet another study on the use of ResearchGate by the research scholars of Pondicherry University, Kalapet (Singson & Amees, 2017) explored the motives, activities and benefits researchers seek or gain from joining ResearchGate. The study was a survey on research scholars in the institution while a simple random sampling technique was used to select 140 scholars that had ResearchGate accounts, and a close-ended questionnaire was used for data collection. The study findings revealed that ResearchGate was popular among research scholars in the university; enabled the scholars to connect with those with similar interests; enabled them to read as well as review articles of other scholars; and enhanced their ability to keep abreast with new and latest developments in their field of research, among other findings.

Overall, it can be safely asserted that research scholars are indeed utilizing ResearchGate to their advantage, and that sharing of ideas and articles is one of the core activities. Also, worthy of note is the fact that sharing is intrinsic to scholarship and self-promotion and will continue regardless of some forms of restrictions. However, the research scholars provided no evidence to suggest that using ResearchGate have enhanced the research performance or output of the subjects of the study. In the light of all these, Singson and Amees (2017) concluded that the advent of technology and its attendant new media tools have made sharing of scholarly ideas and works much easier in contemporary times.

3. Materials and Methods

This study focuses on the impact of ResearchGate on research, and its influence on the research output of lecturers in all Faculties and Departments of six Federal Government-owned Universities located in the South-South Geo-political Zone of Nigeria, as at the time of this study; namely: University of Uyo; Federal University, Otuoke; University of Calabar; Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun; University of Benin; and University of Port Harcourt. The study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 14,091 lecturers; while the sample comprised 576 lecturers who were selected using simple random and proportionate sampling techniques. Structured and validated questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection while the data collected were computed and analysed using simple percentages, frequency tables, and mean values, as recommended by (Uford & Etim, 2018). Table 1 below captures the summary of the population distribution and selected sample units.

Table 1. Breakdown of population of the study and sample size selected in each institution.

No.	State	University	Population	Sample Selected
1.	Akwa Ibom	University of Uyo, Uyo	1521	62
2.	Bayelsa	Federal University, Otuoke	595	24
3.	Cross River	University of Calabar, Calabar	2,984	122
4.	Delta	Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	581	24



5.	Edo	University of Benin, Benin	3,856	158
6.	Rivers	University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt	4,554	186
Total			14,091	576

Source: Records from the Institutions' Departments of Establishment, 2018.

3.1. Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of five hundred and seventy-six (576) copies of questionnaire were produced and distributed among lecturers across various Faculties and Departments in University of Uyo; Federal University, Otuoke; University of Calabar; Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun; University of Benin; and University of Port Harcourt. Out of the 576 copies of questionnaire distributed, 527, representing 91.52% of the overall sample were duly completed, returned, and found useful, and thus used in the analysis. The remaining 49 or 8.5% were not available for analysis; reason being that the lecturers were inaccessible for collection of the questionnaire after repeated visits to their offices. A breakdown of the distribution of returned copies of the questionnaire is presented in the table below.

Table 2 presents information on the distribution of respondents according to the federal universities in the South-South Zone of Nigeria that were involved in the study and the Biodata of the respondents. These include the gender of the respondents; academic qualifications; departments; designations; and years of work experience.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by institutions, gender, academic qualification, department, designation and years of experience.

No	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Name of institution			
1.	University of Uyo, Uyo	57	9.9
2.	Federal University, Otuoke	22	3.82
3.	University of Calabar	109	18.92
4.	Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	21	3.65
5.	University of Benin, Benin	143	24.83
6.	University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt	175	30.4
Total		527	91.52
Gender			
1.	Female	238	41.32
2.	Male	289	50.2
Total		527	91.52
Academic qualifications			
1.	HND/Bachelor's Degree	22	3.82
2.	Postgraduate Diploma (PGD)	7	1.22
3.	Masters' Degree	129	22.4
4.	Doctorate Degree (Ph.D.)	369	64.06
Total		527	91.5
Department			
1.	Agricultural Economics/Animal Science	25	4.7
2.	Accounting (Accountancy)/Marketing	24	4.6
3.	Computer Science (Technology)	11	2.1
4.	Civil/Electrical Engineering	20	3.8
5.	Petroleum and Gas Engineering	11	2.1
6.	Chemical Engineering	11	2.1
7.	Environmental Toxicology	14	2.7
8.	Anatomy/Physiology	25	4.7
9.	Nursing Science/Public Health	22	4.2
10.	Medicine and Surgery	14	2.7
11.	Fisheries/Forestry and Wildlife	15	2.8
12.	Business Administration (Management)	17	3.2
13.	Law	15	2.8
14.	Business/Science Education	27	5.1
15.	English and Literary Studies	17	3.2
16.	Physics/Industrial Physics	20	3.8



17.	Pharmacology and Toxicology	8	1.5
18.	Pharmaceutics and Pharmaceutical Technology	12	2.3
19.	Political Science/Public Administration	12	2.3
20.	Library and Information Science	29	5.5
21.	Educational Management and Planning	23	4.4
22.	Adult/Vocational and Technical Education (Studies)	27	5.1
23.	Philosophy	17	3.2
24.	Music/Creative Arts/Theatre Arts/Film Studies	20	3.8
25.	Biology/Microbiology	16	3.0
26.	Mathematics/Statistics	16	3.0
27.	Economics/Sociology and Anthropology	16	3.0
28.	Chemistry/Industrial Chemistry	14	2.7
29.	French/Foreign Languages/Linguistics	12	2.3
30.	Mass Communication	17	3.2
Total		527	91.5
Designation			
1.	Graduate Assistant	30	5.2
2.	Assistant Lecturer	63	10.94
3.	Lecturer II	105	18.23
4.	Lecturer I	98	17.01
5.	Senior Lecturer	109	18.92
6.	Associate Professor	65	11.3
7.	Professor	57	9.9
Total		527	91.5
Years of experience			
1.	1-7 years	122	21.2
2.	8-15 years	230	39.9
3.	16 years and above	175	30.4
Total		527	91.5

A breakdown of the analysis on table 2 indicates that the University of Port Harcourt had the highest number of respondents with 175 (33.2%). This is followed by University of Benin with 143 (27.1%). The third is University of Calabar with 109 (20.7%). The fourth is University of Uyo with 57 (10.8%). In fifth position is Federal University, Otuoke that had 22 (4.2%). The institution with the least number of respondents is Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun with 21 (4%). The disparity in the number of respondents across the universities is not unconnected with the differences in the number of respondents selected from each of the universities on proportionate basis.

On the biodata of the respondents, gender distribution of the respondents showed that 238 (45.16%) were female lecturers while 289 (54.84%) were male lecturers. Academic qualifications of respondents were as follows: HND/Bachelor's Degree – 22 (4.2%); Postgraduate Diploma (PGD) – 7 (1.3%); Masters' Degree – 129 (24.5%); and Doctorate Degree (Ph.D.) – 369 or 70%. The distribution breakdown shows that Doctorate Degree is highest, followed by Masters' and HND/Bachelor's Degree, with the Postgraduate Diploma as the least, respectively.

On the departments of the respondents, as shown on the table, 47 departments were involved in the study. It however shows that the Department of Library and Information Science had 29 respondents, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology had 8 respondents, indicating that the two had the highest and least number of respondents involved in the study, respectively.

The rank or designation of the respondents indicated that respondents who were in the rank of Senior Lecturers were 109 (20.6%), Lecturer II were 105 (20%), Lecturer 1 were 98 (18.6%); while Associate Professors and Assistant Lecturers were 65 (12.3%) and 63 (12%) respectively. Full Professors were 57 (10.8%). Graduate Assistants had the least number of respondents with 30 lecturers (5.7%). Respondents' years of experience as shown on table 2 indicate that those who had 1-7 years of service were 122 (23.2%); 8-15 years were 230 (43.6%); 16 years and above were 175 (33.2%). The implication of all these is that the distribution of the questionnaire penetrated all strata of the respondents. This can therefore be a justifiable basis for drawing conclusions



4. Results and Discussion

The analysis on Table 3 reveals that at a significant mean value of 3.25, ResearchGate had positive impact on the research output of lecturers because it helped them to create original content during their research studies ($x=3.25$); promoted cooperation and collaboration among academic peers by providing the lecturers a forum for sharing literature, study findings and theories, etc. ($x=3.28$); enabled lecturers to share scholarly content with academic peers ($x=3.30$); kept the lecturers updated with current developments in their professional areas ($x=3.25$); and helped the lecturers keep track of articles and publications in their professional areas which assists them during literature search ($x=3.28$). However, constructs such as ResearchGate enabled the lecturers to create topics for their studies yearly ($x=3.22$) and enabled them to get published at least once a year ($x=3.18$) had less significant influence because their mean values were less than the significant mean value of 3.25.

Table 3. Mean values analysis of the impact of ResearchGate on the research output of lecturers.

No	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
1.	ResearchGate helps me create original content during my research studies	202	272	38	15	527	3.25	S
2.	ResearchGate promotes cooperation and collaboration among my academic peers as it provides a forum for sharing literature, study findings, theories, etc.	216	257	39	15	527	3.28	S
3.	I use ResearchGate to share scholarly content with my academic peers	223	254	34	16	527	3.30	S
4.	ResearchGate keeps me updated with current developments in my professional area	206	266	38	17	527	3.25	S
5.	ResearchGate helps me keep track of articles and publications in my professional area which assist me during literature search	218	253	40	16	527	3.28	S
6.	ResearchGate enables me to create topics for study yearly	204	254	52	17	527	3.22	NS
7.	ResearchGate enables me to publish at least once yearly	181	276	53	17	527	3.18	NS
Weighted Average (Significant at) = 3.25								

The preceding analysis implies that ResearchGate has positive impact on the research output of lecturers in Federal Universities in the South-South of Nigeria. Its findings are in agreement with the revelations of Chakraborty (2012), that ResearchGate had assisted scholars from the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India, on their research activities, especially by scholars from the social science background. The findings also confirm Singson and Amees' (2017) investigation of its usage among the research scholars of Pondicherry University, Kalapet, India, where it was found that ResearchGate was not only popular among the research scholars but also enabled them to connect with those with similar interests; enabled them to read as well as review articles of other scholars; and enhanced their ability to keep abreast with new and latest developments in their fields of research.

However, this study findings raises some questions about the observation of Thelwall and Kousha (2015) that ResearchGate has uneven coverage of scholarship, with the arts and humanities, health professions, and decision sciences poorly represented. On the contrary, this study covered about thirty different areas of discipline; the instrument used in gathering data (questionnaire) penetrated all strata of the respondents; and data analysis on Tables 2 and 3 attests to the spread and impact of ResearchGate on the research output of the lecturers. Also, in its "Company fact sheet" published in 2022, it clearly shows that ResearchGate's coverage cuts across many disciplines, with Medicine, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics accounting for 39% of the coverage (ResearchGate, 2022). All these are in the health and decision sciences areas.

The findings of this study have proven that ResearchGate do positively impact on the research output of lecturers in Universities of South-South Nigeria; therefore, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) ResearchGate is replete with information resources, data, research findings/reports



that can enhance the quality and quantity of the research output of lecturers in universities, there is therefore need for lecturers to explore and utilize same more.

(2) The lecturers should also consider using ResearchGate in combination with other related academic platforms such as Academia.edu, Google Scholar, Mendeley, Semantic Scholar, amongst others, as these tools have relevant academic contents that can boost the quality and facilitate the process of research.

(3) It is equally important that lecturers become registered with ResearchGate in order to enjoy certain privileges of collaboration such as sharing their works early in the research cycle, getting feedback and inputs from their peers across the globe. These are available in such features as the “question submission-and-response knowledgebase” which is only accessible to registered members.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions have been drawn:

First, it has established that university lecturers in the six Federal Government-owned Universities located in the South-South Geo-political Zone of Nigeria are well aware of the vast potentials that abound in ResearchGate and have deployed its available and readily accessible tools, features and resources in their research works as well as in other areas of their academic activities.

Second, it has proven that ResearchGate has impact on research as it has helped lecturers to create original content for their research studies, which is an important aspect of research as an ‘original and independent investigation’ undertaken to contribute to knowledge.

Furthermore, this study findings have re-affirmed the fact that ResearchGate provides lecturers with a viable platform for academic visibility as they use it to connect with academic peers, collaborate with them as well as share scholarly content of various forms - literature, study findings, and theories, among others.

Also, ResearchGate helps lecturers to get updates on current trends and developments in their various professional fields as well as in the areas of their research interests.

Finally, through usage of ResearchGate lecturers have been able to keep track of articles and publications in their professional areas which assists them during literature search when embarking on research.

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