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Impact of national education policy 2020 on higher education students in Darjeeling: An empirical study

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India aims to reform the higher-education system by promoting inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, and skill development. This empirical study investigates the impact of NEP 2020 on higher education students in Darjeeling, West Bengal, which has a unique sociocultural context. This study employs both analytical and empirical methodologies, utilizing primary data collected through structured questionnaires and secondary data from relevant sources. A sample of 65 undergraduate and postgraduate students from various government and private colleges in Darjeeling was selected using convenience sampling methods. This study examines the key variables associated with NEP 2020, including awareness, effectiveness, and overall impact on the higher education system. The findings revealed that 58.5% of the respondents were aware of the NEP 2020, and 63.1% agreed that it would have a positive and lasting impact on higher education. The policy was perceived as particularly effective in developing industry-relevant skills (63.1%), enhancing employability (61.5%), and improving their life skills (61.5%). The respondents also concurred that NEP 2020 would elevate educational standards (58.5%) and make global education more affordable (56.9%). Hypothesis testing confirmed the significant effect of NEP on higher education students, an association between awareness and perceived positive impact, and a correlation between gender and perceived impact of climate change. However, lower agreement rates on aspects such as extensive research (52.3%) and optimal use of technology (53.8%) suggest areas for improvement in policy implementation. The study concludes that while the NEP 2020 shows promise in transforming higher education in Darjeeling, its success is contingent upon effective implementation, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive strategies to address the identified challenges.

Keywords: National education policy (NEP) 2020, higher education, Darjeeling, West Bengal, inclusivity, skill development, interdisciplinarity, empirical study, etc.

1. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India signifies a crucial transformation in the educational domain, emphasizing reforms aimed at evolving the nation into a sustainable and equitable knowledge society. This policy aspires to ensure universal access to high-quality education, thereby positioning India as a global knowledge superpower (Raj, 2024) ^[17]. Introduced after a 34-year hiatus, the NEP 2020 presents a comprehensive framework that spans primary to higher education, as well as vocational and internet-based learning. It is grounded on five pillars: access, equity, affordability, accountability, and quality, which are closely aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Kumar *et al.*, 2020) ^[12]. The policy's impact on higher education is particularly noteworthy, as it seeks to address the educational challenges faced by historically marginalized students and promote inclusivity (Raj 2024) ^[17]. The NEP of the 2020s emphasizes inclusivity and raises critical questions about fostering an inclusive educational environment in a nation as diverse as India. Moreover, its successful implementation requires a structural overhaul to overcome the existing challenges within the education system (Kumar *et al.*, 2020) ^[12]. In the context of Darjeeling, West Bengal, the impact of the NEP 2020 on higher education is uniquely significant because of the region's diverse and multicultural demographic. This empirical study investigates how the new policy has influenced higher education students in Darjeeling, examining both the opportunities it presents and the challenges it poses. This study contributes to a broader understanding of the NEP in the 2020s and its implications for regional education dynamics, particularly in historically overlooked areas.

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This study not only seeks to evaluate the reform's effectiveness in Darjeeling but also offers insights into potential improvements and adaptation strategies that could be applied more broadly across similar regions in India.

2. Problem Statement

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India aims to transform the educational landscape by emphasizing inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, and skill enhancement (Kaur, 2024^[9, 10]; Maseeh, 2023^[16]; Raj, 2024)^[17]. While the policy intends to reshape higher education, its impact on regions like Darjeeling, West Bengal, remains understudied (Aithal & Aithal, 2020)^[3]. Darjeeling's unique sociocultural context provides an important setting for assessing the implications of the NEP 2020, particularly for marginalized groups (Aithal & Aithal, 2019)^[1]. Implementation challenges and stakeholder perceptions require investigation to understand the ground realities (Kulal *et al.*, 2024)^[11]. This study examines the impact of NEP 2020 on Darjeeling's higher education sector, focusing on student experiences and institutional readiness. This research aims to identify implementation barriers and solutions (Aithal & Aithal, 2020a^[2]; Vaithianathan *et al.*, 2024)^[22], enabling recommendations that address local needs and inform national policy implementation.

3. Literature Review

Numerous studies have explored various aspects of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India, conducted by a range of researchers and academics over time. The most relevant and recent research on these topics was reviewed and integrated into this study. A concise overview of these studies is provided in the following section.

Uthale and Dalvi (2022)^[21] analyzed the National Education Policy of the 2020s (NEP 2020) in Indian higher education during COVID-19. The NEP 2020 aims to enhance student development through online education. Most respondents were aware of the NEP 2020 and anticipated its benefits. Institutions face financial and learning challenges during digital learning. Students reported satisfaction despite the digital gaps. This research highlights the need for additional qualifications and recommends effective NEP implementation.

Choudhari (2022)^[6] studied the NEP the 2020s impact on higher education in Nagpur City. This policy aims to improve education through practical training and skill development. Stakeholders view it positively as a means of meeting industry demands. Despite the challenges in implementation, the policy advances inclusive education, supporting socioeconomic growth.

Kaur (2024)^[9, 10] examined the implementation of India's National Education Policy 2020, which replaced the 10+2 structure with a 5+3+3+4 framework focusing on critical thinking and mother tongue instruction. Key challenges include changing mindsets, pedagogical changes, assessment methods, staff training, and funding. Higher education faces challenges in terms of degree value and digital connectivity. Its implementation requires cooperative federalism and infrastructure development. The success of NEP 2020 depends on systematic solutions.

Banerjee *et al.* (2020)^[5] analyzed India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on higher education. The NEP 2020 emphasizes flexible subjects, multidisciplinary studies, and technology integration. The policy defines educational

stages from Foundation through Research levels. Key changes from the NEP 1986 include revised structures, examinations, and higher education systems. NEP 2020 establishes a National Research Foundation, introduces credit transfer, and requires a 4-year B.Ed. degrees. It implements Competency-based Credits and digital infrastructure, promoting flexible, research-oriented education.

Kumre (2023)^[15] examined India's NEP 2020, which aims to modernize education to promote growth. It focuses on development, accessibility, and quality, with 20 higher-education themes emphasizing management and research topics. Challenges include establishing schools, mixed-subject education, resources in remote areas, funding, rural activities, English proficiency, digital literacy, school access, sanitation, and a shortage of teachers. The NEP 2020 highlights the role of higher education and early childhood care in national development.

Kumar (2023)^[13] analyzed India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). Ratified in July 2020, NEP 2020 replaces the 1986 policy to transform India's education system. The policy promotes inclusive learning through multilingualism, emphasizing subjects such as Data Analytics and AI while enabling subject choice. Implementation challenges include developing technology-proficient teachers and curriculum modifications. Universities must overcome compartmentalization for interdisciplinary education, and digital connectivity remains crucial. The NEP 2020 provides a framework for value-based education, with success dependent on effective implementation.

Haladkar (2022)^[8] examined India's New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, replacing the 1986 policy. The policy aims to transform the Indian education system through holistic learning and skill development, emphasizing creativity and cultural values. Key changes include early childhood education and instruction in the mother tongue. While the policy presents opportunities through literacy and innovation, challenges include enrollment targets and resource constraints. The success of implementation depends on addressing these challenges.

Gopalan *et al.* (2022)^[7] analyzed public opinion on India's New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 through online surveys of 200 rural participants from Madurai, Chennai, and Bangalore. NEP awareness was highest among ages 15-35, with students opposing changes. Respondents cited insufficient resources for implementation. The NEP aims to shift from teacher-driven to student-driven and evaluation-focused to research-focused approaches, although implementation challenges persist in rural regions. The study's limitations include the sample frame and online data collection, which provide insights into rural India's NEP perception.

Kumari (2024)^[14] examined the challenges of implementing the NEP 2020 in higher education from the perspective of teacher educators. The NEP 2020 replaced the 1986 policy to transform education in India through holistic learning. Key features include raising enrollment to 50% by 2035, establishing a Research Foundation, and creating a single regulatory body. It introduced four-year degrees with multiple exit options. Implementation challenges include financing, the digital divide, faculty development, and inclusion, while opportunities include interdisciplinary

studies and technology use. Success requires effective solutions to these challenges.

Rumi and Mete (2024) ^[19] analyzed India's New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the first such policy since 1986. NEP 2020 aims to make education holistic and aligned with current demands. School reforms include Early Childhood Care, foundational literacy, and curricular restructuring. In higher education, policies promote multidisciplinary learning and technology integration. Opportunities include flexible curricula and digital learning, while challenges include resource allocation and teacher training. The success of implementation depends on addressing these challenges through infrastructure development and stakeholder engagement.

Shabnam and Kaushal (2024) ^[20] analyzed India's higher education challenges regarding the NEP 2020 objectives for 'Viksit Bharat @2047' using government data. The findings show that India's higher education enrollment ratio of 27.3% is below the global average, with access disparities and skill gaps in graduates. Institutions face infrastructure deficits, outdated curricula, and research-quality issues. This study recommends strengthening research, adopting multidisciplinary approaches, using technology, promoting equity, and improving institutional autonomy to prepare youth for global challenges.

4. Research Gap

Numerous studies have examined various aspects of NEP-2020 across India. However, there is a notable lack of substantial research on Darjeeling City, West Bengal, in relation to the NEP-2020. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the perspectives of undergraduate and postgraduate students from various government and private colleges on the diverse aspects of NEP-2020 in Darjeeling City.

5. Significance of the Study

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is important for higher education students in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India. It is crucial to examine how this policy changes education in this diverse area. The NEP 2020 aims to improve India's education system by making it more inclusive, flexible, and high-quality. It focuses on helping historically marginalized groups (Raj, 2024) ^[17]. Studying its impact on Darjeeling is important for several reasons. Darjeeling has a unique culture and history in education, making it a key place to determine whether the policy's goals are met locally. The policy emphasizes vocational education, digital learning, and overall development, which suits Darjeeling's need for tailored educational solutions (Anandraj, 2024 ^[4]; Kaur, 2024) ^[9, 10]. This study can also show the challenges and opportunities students and teachers face with the NEP 2020, especially in involving stakeholders and updating curricula to meet modern teaching and technology standards (Roy & Sharma, 2023 ^[18]; Vaithianathan *et al.*, 2024) ^[22]. Understanding these factors is important for improving how the policy is implemented and ensuring that it creates a globally competitive but locally relevant education system.

6. Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows: (i) to ascertain the level of awareness regarding the National Education Policy (NEP) among students in higher education, (ii) to evaluate the effectiveness of the NEP on students within

higher education institutions, and (iii) to examine the positive and enduring impact of the NEP on the higher education system.

7. Research Methodology

This study employs both analytical and empirical methodologies and integrates primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected exclusively through a structured questionnaire administered during field surveys, utilizing a three-point rating scale informed by prior relevant studies. Additionally, the research incorporates secondary data sourced from related research journals, articles, papers, academic publications, and online resources. The sample comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students from various government and private colleges in Darjeeling, selected via a convenience sampling method within the region. A total of 65 SBI customers completed the questionnaires with affirmative answers. The survey was conducted between August and September 2025. This study investigates several key variables and attributes associated with the new education policy, including awareness of the NEP, its effectiveness on higher education students, and the overall impact of the NEP on the higher education system. The reliability and consistency of the questionnaire were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a satisfactory score of 0.97. Primary data analysis involved frequency tables, simple percentages, and statistical tools such as one-sample t-tests, chi-square tests, and correlation analyses. The statistical software SPSS-26 was used to analyse the primary data and derive relevant conclusions from this research.

8. Hypothesis Formation

To achieve the research objectives of this study, three sets of hypotheses have been formulated. These are as follows.

- **H1:** There is no significant effect of NEP on the students of Higher Education.
- **H2:** There is no association between awareness of NEP and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system.
- **H3:** There is no relation between gender and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system.

9. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis and discussion section of this study is organized into three subsections: Demographic Aspects (including Gender and Awareness about the NEP), Effectiveness of the NEP on Students in Higher Education, and the Overall Impact of the NEP on the Higher Education System, along with hypothesis testing. These subsections are presented and discussed in the following sections.

9.1 Demographic Aspect

This section encompasses two key elements: respondents' gender and their awareness of the NEP. These aspects are discussed in detail below.

9.1.1 Gender of the Respondents

Table 1: Gender

Attribute	Frequency	Percent
Male	34	52.3
Female	31	47.7
Total	65	100

(Source: Primary Data)

Observation: From the above table, it can be observed that 52.3% of the respondents are male, whereas 47.7% of the respondents are female.

9.1.2 Awareness about the National Education Policy

Table 2: Awareness about the National Education Policy

Attribute	Frequency	Percent
Aware	38	58.5
Neutral	13	20
Unaware	14	21.5
Total	65	100

(Source: Primary Data)

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents Based on Their Perception of the Effectiveness of NEP on Higher Education Students

Effectiveness of NEP on Students of Higher Education	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Enhance Life Skills	40	61.5	13	20	12	18.5
Improvement in Education Standard	38	58.5	16	24.6	11	16.9
Students Can Afford Global Education	37	56.9	18	27.7	10	15.4
Optimum Use of Technology	35	53.8	20	30.8	10	15.4
Develop Skills to Meet Industry Requirements	41	63.1	17	26.2	7	10.8
Enhance The Ability to Get a Job	40	61.5	16	24.6	9	13.8
Extensive Research	34	52.3	19	29.2	12	18.5

(Source: Primary Data)

Observation: The data in the above table reveal several significant findings concerning the National Education Policy (NEP). The statement "Develop Skills to Meet Industry Requirements" garnered 63.1% agreement, indicating a strong belief in the NEP's capacity to align with industry needs. Both "Enhance the Ability to Get a Job" and "Enhance Life Skills" achieved 61.5% agreement, suggesting the NEP's perceived effectiveness in enhancing employability and life skills. Furthermore, 58.5% of respondents agreed with "Improvement in Education Standard," while 56.9% believed that the NEP enables students to access global education. Regarding the "Optimum Use of Technology," 53.8% agreed, although 30.8% were neutral. "Extensive Research" received the lowest agreement (52.3%) and the highest disagreement (18.5%), indicating potential implementation gaps in this area. Agreement percentages consistently surpassed disagreement across attributes, reflecting a favorable perception of the NEP's effectiveness. Higher neutral responses for technology use (30.8%) and global education affordability (27.7%) suggest uncertainty. Disagreement rates ranged from 10.8% to 18.5%, with career-oriented attributes showing the strongest support, underscoring the NEP's perceived alignment with job market demands.

9.3 Overall Impact of the NEP on the Higher Education System

This section elucidates the positive and enduring impact of the National Education Policy (NEP) on the higher education system. The discussion is presented below:

Observation: From the above table, it is evident that 58.5% of the respondents are aware of the national education policy (NEP), whereas 21.5% of the respondents are unaware of it.

9.2 Effectiveness of NEP on Students of Higher Education

The effectiveness of the NEP is evidenced by the following seven potential attributes: enhancement of life skills, improvement of educational standards, affordability of global education for students, optimal utilization of technology, development of skills to meet industry requirements, enhancement of employability, and facilitation of extensive research. The attributes are discussed below.

9.3.1 Positive and Long-Lasting Impact of NEP on the Higher Education System

Table 4: Positive and Long-Lasting Impact of NEP on the Higher Education System

Attribute	Frequency	Percent
Agree	41	63.1
Neutral	14	21.5
Disagree	10	15.4
Total	65	100

(Source: Primary Data)

Observation: From the above table, it has been found that 63.1% of the respondents agreed on the Positive and Long-Lasting Impact of NEP on the higher education system, whereas 15.4% of the respondents disagreed.

9.4 Hypothesis Testing

9.4.1 One-sample t-test: The one-sample t-test is a statistical technique used to determine whether a sample mean significantly differs from a known or hypothesized population mean. This test compares the mean of a single sample to a specific value rather than comparing two distinct groups. In this study, a one-sample t-test was employed to assess whether NEP had a significant effect on students in higher education.

9.4.1.1 Hypothesis-1

H_0 : There is no significant effect of NEP on the students of Higher Education.

H_1 : There is a significant effect of NEP on the students of Higher Education.

Table 5: One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Enhance Life Skills	16.015	64	0.000	1.56923	1.3735	1.765
Improvement in Education Standard	16.627	64	0.000	1.58462	1.3942	1.775
Students Can Afford Global Education	17.085	64	0.000	1.58462	1.3993	1.7699
Optimum Use of Technology	17.515	64	0.000	1.61538	1.4311	1.7996
Develop Skills to Meet Industry Requirements	17.33	64	0.000	1.47692	1.3067	1.6472
Enhance The Ability to Get a Job	16.794	64	0.000	1.52308	1.3419	1.7043
Extensive Research	17.259	64	0.000	1.66154	1.4692	1.8539

(Source: Compiled by Researcher)

Interpretation: From the above table, it is found that the P value of the test at the 5% level of significance is 0.000, which is less than 0.05 for all the probable attributes of effectiveness of NEP on students of higher education, as assumed by the respondents in the study area. So, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that NEP has a significant effect on Higher Education students.

9.4.2 Chi-Square Test: The chi-squared test was employed in the current study to evaluate the hypothesis that two categorical variables are independent. Specifically, this

study examined the potential differences between the means of these two variables. The researcher analyzed the degree of association between awareness of the NEP and the positive and enduring impact of NEP on the higher-education system.

9.4.2.1 Hypothesis-2

H₀: There is no association between awareness of NEP and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system.

H₁: There is an association between awareness of NEP and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system.

Table 6: Crosstabulation between Awareness about NEP and the Positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system

			The Positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system			Total
			Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
Awareness about NEP	Aware	Number	36	2	0	38
		% of Total	55.40%	3.10%	0.00%	58.50%
	Neutral	Number	4	9	0	13
		% of Total	6.20%	13.80%	0.00%	20.00%
	Unaware	Number	1	3	10	14
		% of Total	1.50%	4.60%	15.40%	21.50%
Total		Number	41	14	10	65
		% of Total	63.10%	21.50%	15.40%	100.00%

(Source: Compiled by Researcher)

Table 7: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	69.964	4	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	65.243	4	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	46.122	1	0.000
No of Valid Cases	65		

(Source: Compiled by Researcher)

Interpretation: The Pearson chi-square or P-value of the test at the 5% level of significance was 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is an association between awareness of the NEP and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system.

The cross-tabulation reveals that 58.50% of respondents are aware of the new education policy, whereas 63.10% of respondents agree that it has a positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system.

9.4.3 Correlation Test: Correlation is employed to indicate the degree of association between variables. Two variables are considered correlated when variations in the magnitude of one variable are accompanied by variations in the magnitude of the other. This study seeks to assess the relationship between gender and the positive and enduring impact of NEP on higher education systems.

9.4.3.1 Hypothesis-3

H₀: There is no relation between gender and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system.

H₁: There is a relation between gender and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system.

Table 8: Correlations

		Gender	The Positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	0.528
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	65	65
The Positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system	Pearson Correlation	0.528	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	65	65

(Source: Compiled by Researcher)

Interpretation: In the above table, the bivariate correlation test has been applied to test the correlation between gender and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on the higher education system. In the above correlation matrix, Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.528, and the p-value for a two-tailed test is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, at the 5% level of significance. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a strong positive correlation between gender and the positive and long-lasting impact of NEP on higher education systems.

10. Findings of the Study

The study found that most people had a positive view of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's effect on higher education in Darjeeling. Many agreed that it helps improve skills, job chances, and education quality. However, some were unsure, as shown by their neutral answers on some points. The main findings of this study are as follows:

10.1 Awareness of NEP 2020

Of the respondents, 58.5% were aware of the new education policy, while 21.5% were unaware.

10.2 Effectiveness of NEP in Higher Education Students

- A total of 63.1% agreed that it develops skills to meet industry requirements.
- Of the respondents, 61.5% agreed that it enhances employability and life skills.
- Of the respondents, 58.5% agreed that it improves education standards.
- A total of 56.9% believed that it enables students to afford global education.
- Of the respondents, 53.8% agreed on the optimal use of technology.
- A total of 52.3% agreed to facilitate extensive research.

10.3 Overall Impact

- A total of 63.1% agreed that NEP 2020 will have a positive and long-lasting impact on the higher education system.
- Of the respondents, 15.4% disagreed with the statement.

10.4 Hypothesis Testing Results

- There is a significant effect of NEP on students of higher education (H1 accepted)
- There is an association between awareness of NEP and its perceived positive impact (H2 accepted)
- The correlation between gender and perceived positive impact is found (H3 accepted)

10.5 Demographics

- 52.3% of respondents were male, 47.7% female

11. Conclusion

The empirical investigation conducted in Darjeeling, West Bengal, provides substantial insights into the implications of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for higher education students. The results revealed a predominantly favorable perception of the policy's efficacy and its potential for a lasting impact on the higher education system. Most participants (58.5%) were aware of the NEP 2020, indicating successful dissemination of information regarding the policy. Furthermore, 63.1% of respondents concurred that the policy would exert a positive and enduring influence on higher education. The policy was perceived as particularly effective in fostering industry-relevant skills (63.1% agreement), enhancing employability (61.5%), and improving students' life skills (61.5%). These findings suggest that the NEP 2020 is well aligned with the demands of the job market and the personal development of students. Respondents agreed that the policy would elevate educational standards (58.5%) and render global education more affordable (56.9%), indicating its potential to enhance the overall quality and accessibility of higher education. The study's hypothesis testing revealed significant effects of NEP on higher education students, a strong association between awareness of NEP and its perceived positive impact, and a correlation between gender and the policy's perceived impact. Although the overall perception was positive, lower agreement rates on aspects such as extensive research (52.3%) and optimal use of technology (53.8%) suggest areas where implementation efforts could be strengthened in the future. These findings underscore the potential of the NEP 2020 to transform higher education in Darjeeling, aligning it more closely with industry needs and global standards. However, the study also highlights the need for continued efforts in policy implementation, particularly in areas such as research promotion and technology integration. Future research could focus on longitudinal studies to track the long-term impacts of the NEP 2020, as well as comparative analyses with other regions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the policy's effectiveness across diverse educational contexts in India. In conclusion, while the NEP 2020 shows promise in addressing key educational challenges in Darjeeling's higher-education landscape, its success will ultimately depend on effective implementation, continued stakeholder engagement, and adaptive strategies to overcome the identified challenges.

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