

DIGITAL TOOLS, MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: Introduction. The integration of digital tools and gamification in physical education (PE) has proven to be a revolutionary approach to increase student engagement, motivation, and performance. Recent studies highlight the potential of digital education. applications, exergames, mobile apps, and virtual reality to stimulate active participation, improve skill acquisition, and foster psychological well-being. These innovations align with global educational challenges, particularly the shift towards online and blended learning models after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Material and Methods. This study is a theoretical review of relevant literature, analyzing recent systematic reviews, empirical findings, and conceptual frameworks on the role of digital technologies in PE. Sources include research focused on gamification, exergames, wearable technologies, mobile tracking applications, flipped learning strategies, and artificial intelligence applied to physical education.

Results. The synthesis of findings reveals that digital tools positively influence both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, leading to higher participation rates, improved physical fitness, and enhanced learning outcomes. Evidence suggests that gamified approaches reduce anxiety, foster collaboration, and improve classroom climate, while digital feedback systems (e.g., heart rate monitoring, mobile applications) increase self-efficacy and performance. However, barriers persist, including teacher digital competence, unequal access to technology, and concerns regarding psychological well-being.

Conclusions. The adoption of digital tools into PE presents a promising pedagogical pathway for improving motivation and performance in students. Success depends on strategic implementation, teacher training, and adequate infrastructure. A balanced approach, combining digital innovation with traditional methods, ensures relevance and sustainability in PE while promoting lifelong engagement with physical activity.

Keywords: physical education, gamification, digital tools, motivation, performance

Introduction

The integration of digital tools and gamification in physical education (PE) has brought about a significant change in the way we teach, especially in response to the educational demands and circumstances that are still ongoing, such as the global pandemic. With the rapid shift of the educational process online during the COVID-19 pandemic, the introduction of gamified digital experiences has proven indispensable to support student engagement in physical education. Research indicates that these digital interventions facilitate active learning through interaction, which enhances students' interest and motivation towards physical activities (Filha et al., 2023, Suelves et al., 2023).

Gamification, which refers to the application of game design elements in non-play contexts, revitalizes physical education classes by adding a spirit of competition and motivating rewards (Soriano-Pascual et al., 2022). Systematic studies show that gamification can stimulate both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels of students,

potentially leading to improved academic performance and physical fitness outcomes (Férriz-Valero et al., 2020, Sal-de-Rellán et al., 2025). Gamified practices not only keep students active during lessons but also contribute to their psychological well-being by reducing anxiety and fostering cooperative learning scenarios (Goodyear et al., 2021, Soriano-Pascual et al., 2022).

Moreover, the pedagogical impacts of gamification extend beyond mere engagement; they also encompass various dimensions of learning. A diversified methodological approach, such as flipped learning integrated with gamification strategies, has emerged as effective (Sargent & Casey, 2019, Segura-Robles et al., 2020). This combination allows students to prepare theoretical content outside of class and engage in hands-on, physically demanding activities during PE sessions. Thus, the pressure on traditional PE time is alleviated by making physical activity more cohesive with learning

objectives, ultimately supporting broader educational goals (Yao et al., 2021).

Exercise games, which link games to physical activity, promote kinesthetic learning and encourage intense physical engagement (Quintas et al., 2020). Exergames, bridging gaming and physical activity, stimulate kinesthetic learning while encouraging intense physical engagement (Quintas et al., 2020). Quantitative evaluations of digital applications in PE reveal marked increases in participation rates, skill development, and overall motor skills improvement among students when data-driven gamification strategies are meticulously planned (Botes, 2024).

The research emphasizes that educational efficacy hinges on the strategic implementation of these technologies. For a diversified pedagogical framework to be effective, educators require comprehensive training along with a clear understanding of how to leverage social networks and digital tools within the PE curriculum (Goodyear et al., 2021, Montiel-Ruiz et al., 2023). The integration of these modern informatics systems enables tailored learning pathways that address the unique needs of every student, particularly in socioeconomically diverse environments (Sotos-Martínez et al., 2023). Appropriately harnessed, these tools ensure all students gain equitable access to quality physical education experiences that promote lifelong engagement with physical activity and healthy living.

A noteworthy outcome of utilizing digital gaming techniques in educational settings is their ability to enhance the quality of social interactions among students, cultivating a community atmosphere in PE classes. Studies suggest that gamified interventions can instill vital soft skills such as teamwork, communication and critical thinking, which are essential for the holistic development of students, both in and out of school (Ferraz et al., 2024, Carcelén-Fraile et al., 2025). By integrating cooperative games, students become more likely to help each other, which contributes to reducing disruptive behavior and creating an inclusive learning atmosphere (Fernández-Río et al., 2021). The benefits of gamification also extend to a deeper understanding of concepts related to fitness, healthy lifestyles, and personal development among students. The educational value of game-based physical activities provides students with the necessary knowledge to lead a healthy life, encouraging them to adopt and maintain fitness habits even after completing formal education

(Férriz-Valero et al., 2020). This aligns with the overall goal of combating global health crises, which are increasingly common due to sedentary lifestyles, especially among young people (Arufe-Giráldez et al., 2022). The results highlight the crucial importance of technology, especially gamified applications, in transforming modern methods of teaching physical education. Therefore, it is essential that institutions provide the necessary resources and support for teachers to explore and adopt these innovative tools to improve their pedagogical effectiveness (Muñoz et al., 2022). Continuing research and exploration in the field of digital gamification in physical education classrooms is vital, given the rapid impact of technological advances on the educational landscape. Ultimately, the adoption of gamification can ensure PE retains its relevance and efficacy in promoting both physical health and academic success among today's students.

The integration of digital tools and gamification in physical education presents a compelling case for transforming teaching and learning methodologies. Creating an environment that emphasizes student engagement, enhanced motivation, and comprehensive skills development contributes to cultivating a society that values physical activity, well-being, and lifelong healthy habits. The alignment of digital partnerships with effective teaching strategies ultimately paves the way for a more active, connected, and health-conscious future.

Material and Methods

This study was designed as an extensive theoretical analysis, based on a rigorous selection of scientific articles on the role of digital tools in student motivation and performance in physical education. To increase the transparency and reproducibility of the process, the methodology was organized according to the principles used in the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), specifically adapted for a narrative review. This structure aims to clarify how the studies included in this synthesis were identified, selected and analyzed.

The study aims to synthesize the most relevant existing evidence on the impact of digital tools on student motivation and performance in physical education, through the following objectives:

- Identify the main categories of digital tools applied in physical education.
- Analyze their effects on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

- Evaluate the contribution of digital technology to the development of motor skills and physical performance.
- Examine the pedagogical, technological and psychological factors that influence the implementation of digitalization in physical education.
- Identify existing challenges and barriers.
- Synthesis of future development directions in the field of digitalized physical education.

The identification of articles was carried out by consulting major databases, such as Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, Wiley Online Library, MDPI and Frontiers, and this process was complemented by additional searches in Google Scholar and ResearchGate. The selection of publications was guided by a series of terms relevant to the field, including “physical education”, “digital tools”, “gamification”, “exergames”, “virtual reality”, “mobile applications”, “motivation”, “performance”, “IoT”, “wearable technology”.

The selection of studies followed rigorous criteria, adapted to the research objectives. Articles published between 2012 and 2025, evaluated through a peer-review process, with direct relevance to the fields of digitalization, physical education, motivation and performance were included. The studies analyzed targeted school or university populations, and access to the full-text version in English was a mandatory condition. In contrast, research that focused exclusively on performance sports, articles with no relevance to the digitalization of physical education, non-scientific materials, as well as studies for which the full text was not available were excluded.

The selection process followed a structure inspired by the PRISMA flow. Initially, approximately 220 articles were identified, of which 165 remained after removing duplicates. In the screening stage, based on title and abstract, 91 articles were selected, and the full text analysis led to a final number of approximately 49 studies included in the synthesis. These included a variety of typologies: empirical studies, systematic reviews, experimental research on gamification, studies dedicated to virtual reality, IoT technologies or mobile applications, as well as theoretical investigations on motivation based on self-determination theory or the link between technology and performance in physical education.

However, the analysis encountered certain limitations, especially related to the high

heterogeneity of the studies, methodological and thematic diversity, but also restricted access to some articles. Also, the absence of comparable data made it impossible to carry out a statistical meta-analysis. Despite these constraints, the adopted methodology ensures rigor, transparency and reproducibility of the study, leveraging the PRISMA principles in a complex and comprehensive narrative review.

The integration of digital tools in PE activities

The implementation of digital technologies in physical education (PE) in Romania has gained renewed focus, particularly given the rapid technological advancements and changed educational paradigms influenced by contemporary challenges. The adaptation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) within PE presents opportunities for enhancing teaching methodologies, engaging students more effectively, and increasing the accessibility of physical education resources. This synthesis delves into the multifaceted roles of digital tools in Romanian physical education, underlining their implications for pedagogical innovation, student engagement, and health outcomes.

engagement and health outcomes. Studies show that the interaction between big data and information technology can improve the quality of physical education by refining teaching strategies and increasing physical literacy (Chen, 2024). In addition, innovative approaches to physical education curriculum design, as explored by Țurcanu and Lakhdari (2024), highlight the potential of integrating ICT to create engaging and effective environments in physical education, especially in primary education. These advances reflect a broader trend towards smart training that leverages analytical data to shape personalized training regimens. Many international studies confirm the importance of virtual innovations in improving educational experiences in physical education. Jong and his collaborators (2013) demonstrate that both physical and virtual laboratories facilitate scientific inquiry and exploration, highlighting how virtual environments allow students to engage with complex concepts that are often inaccessible in traditional environments. Combining physical experiments with digital simulations allows for extended experiments, which are extremely valuable when constraints limit physical interaction. This model has significant implications for education in Romania, where traditional learning landscapes can be effectively

complemented with innovative virtual tools to maintain student engagement and understanding. The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed a significant shift towards online educational models, revealing both challenges and opportunities within Romanian PE. The research by Edelhauser and Lupu-Dima (2020, 2021) illuminates the rapid transition to eLearning platforms and the diverse digital tools employed across educational settings during the pandemic.

In particular, the obstacles that students faced in adapting PE curricula to remote learning contexts signal a pressing need for development in both pedagogical frameworks and technological infrastructure. The incorporation of relevant digital platforms during this shift necessitates attention to user experience and accessibility, as highlighted by Torkos (2023), who stresses the importance of engaging multimedia teaching methods in enhancing educational outcomes for primary school pupils.

Furthermore, the integration of immersive technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), presents transformative educational potentials. Yuehong's (2023) investigation into VR applications in physical education suggests that VR technology can significantly enhance motor skills and engagement among students. Although considerations regarding the cost and accessibility of VR technologies in Romanian educational environments exist, their adoption presents a compelling opportunity for enhancing the effectiveness of PE programs. The innovative use of VR can encapsulate experiential learning in ways that traditional methods may not, leading to improved physical skills and enthusiasm among learners.

However, the primary challenge remains in the effective implementation of these varied technologies within Romanian PE frameworks. The framework proposed by Liu (2021) on the BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) model indicates a meaningful pathway for integrating everyday tech devices into educational methodologies, effectively bridging the gap between personal and academic learning environments. This model paves the way for teachers and students to utilize available resources efficiently, thereby enhancing engagement and participation in physical activities.

Moreover, existing studies indicate that education systems must evolve to remain relevant and impactful, as the changing landscape of education necessitates more than mere technology adoption. Eftimie (2012) emphasizes the significance of

educators' perceptions and readiness to integrate these systems, suggesting that professional development for teachers is paramount in achieving successful technology integration. Continuous educator training in emerging technologies will thereby ensure that PE teachers are equipped to maximize the benefits from digital tools, ensuring students receive holistic and beneficial learning experiences.

In examining health-related behaviors, Lotrean et al. (2021) established that a high percentage of Romanian university students adhere to recommended physical activity levels, highlighting the positive correlation between PE programming and health outcomes in young adults. Integrating advanced digital platforms into PE can further bolster these health initiatives by providing real-time data on student engagements, activity levels, and overall health metrics. Consequently, technology not only serves instructional functions but also becomes pivotal for promoting healthier lifestyles among students. The growing emphasis on personalized learning trajectories within PE contexts demands further exploration into data collection and analysis capabilities. Wang's (2022) discussions on the advancement of platforms utilizing Internet of Things (IoT) technologies reveal that such systems can enhance classroom teaching effectiveness by collecting and analyzing real-time data on students' physical activities. This contemporary application of IoT in the teaching context aligns seamlessly with the growing need for data-informed decision-making in educational settings, particularly pertinent to the design of PE curricula that respond to student needs.

Despite these promising advancements, the incorporation of technologies continues to face scrutiny regarding their impact and effectiveness in educational contexts. Crăciun and Bunoiu's (2019) assessment regarding the use of digital comics as a method for invigorating Romanian science education offers insights into the potential of innovative ICT-based methodologies. ICT-based methodologies show us how we can draw parallels between their findings and potential applications in physical education. They demonstrate a significant educational shift, moving towards dynamic and interactive environments that stimulate creativity and better capture students' interest. The use of digital tools in physical education in Romania has a huge potential to transform teaching and learning paradigms. Using information technology, virtual reality and multimedia resources, educators can

create environments that encourage student engagement, health promotion and innovative pedagogical methods. However, to achieve these advances, comprehensive teacher training, adequate infrastructural support and a constant commitment to evaluating and adapting curricula to meet the demands of an ever-evolving digital educational landscape will be needed.

Motivation in physical education

Motivation in physical education (ME) is an essential factor determining student engagement and participation in physical activities. Understanding the various elements that influence motivation can help educators create an environment that encourages physical activity, both in and out of the classroom. A central concept in this understanding is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which suggests that intrinsic motivation, influenced by the satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs, can have a significant impact on student behavior, learning outcomes, and overall well-being (Karagiannidis et al., 2015, Hernández et al., 2019). This review examines the multidimensional aspects of motivation in physical education, drawing on empirical studies and their implications for educational practices. Research by Karagiannidis et al. (2015) illustrates that promoting autonomous motivation in physical education can lead to increased leisure-time physical activity, suggesting that students who feel more autonomous in their PE environment are likely to develop a desire for physical activity beyond school settings. This finding is crucial as it highlights the trans-contextual model of motivation, wherein strategies employed in PE directly influence students' motivation outside of school. By nurturing an autonomy-supportive environment during PE lessons through various teaching strategies, educators can empower students to take control of their physical engagement and health (Karagiannidis et al., 2015, Hernández et al., 2019).

Moreover, Hernandez et al. (2019) emphasize that controlling teacher behavior, which can hinder students' perceptions of autonomy, often diminishes their motivation towards physical activity. These insights underscore the need for PE teachers to adopt a more supportive role that encourages student participation rather than imposing restrictions or competition that may lead to anxiety and disengagement. Such a teacher-student dynamic is pivotal for enhancing intrinsic motivation and engagement, ultimately resulting

in more meaningful participation in physical activities (Morton et al., 2015).

The result is more active participation in physical activities. The importance of creating a positive motivational climate is also evident from the systematic review by Morton et al. (2015), which suggests that feelings of belonging and the socio-emotional context of physical education have a significant impact on student motivation. It is essential to recognize the negative effects of competitive environments that emphasize performance over enjoyment; these environments can generate feelings of resentment or injustice among students, leading to low motivation. Strategies that emphasize inclusive practices and active participation not only increase enjoyment but also contribute to creating a more engaging learning atmosphere that supports the physical well-being of adolescents. In addition, interventions that integrate gamification into sports lessons have significant potential to boost student motivation. Studies by Fernández-Río et al. (2021) suggest that gamified learning experiences significantly improve students' intrinsic motivation, according to the principles of SDT (Autonomy and Motivation Theory). By integrating game mechanics and challenges into sports activities, educators can effectively motivate students, transforming physical activity into an enjoyable and rewarding experience. This approach not only attracts students' attention, but also their fundamental psychological needs for competence and autonomy, essential for maintaining engagement in physical activities. González-Cutre and Sicilia (2018), in their analysis of the role of novelty in satisfaction in physical education, support this idea, identifying novelty as a crucial factor influencing motivation. When students encounter new and stimulating experiences, their intrinsic motivation tends to be enhanced, contributing to their overall satisfaction during lessons (González-Cutre & Sicilia, 2018). This finding advocates PE curricula that integrate diverse activities to maintain engagement and enthusiasm among students, thereby fostering a lifelong appreciation for physical fitness.

In addition, applying heart rate feedback in PE lessons has demonstrated psychophysiological benefits, indicating that students' motivation can be substantially increased through immediate feedback mechanisms (Stöckel & Grimm, 2021). According to the findings shared by Stöckel and Grimm (2021), heart rate monitoring during physical activities not only enhances enjoyment but also encourages more effort during these

activities, thereby potentially leading to increased fitness levels and overall physical activity outside of school. This technological integration in PE emphasizes the importance of individualized feedback as an impactful method for enhancing student motivation.

However, challenges persist with respect to motivation in PE, particularly regarding students' body-related concerns. Research by Haug et al. (2023) underscores the detrimental effects of amotivation among students, illustrating a need for interventions that specifically address motivational deficits. Among students, there is a need for interventions that specifically address motivational deficits. When students are low in motivation, their engagement in physical education may decrease, leading to negative outcomes for their physical fitness and activity levels. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and mitigate factors that contribute to amotivation, such as concerns about body image. A longitudinal study by Yun et al. (2024) highlights the importance of meeting psychological needs, showing that students' motivations develop in an environment where their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. This highlights the crucial role of the learning environment created by teachers, where support for fundamental psychological needs is positively correlated with students' intrinsic motivation and engagement in physical activity. Overall, promoting an autonomy-supportive environment, coupled with innovative teaching methods such as gamification, can enhance motivation in physical education. Encouraging student autonomy, providing constructive feedback, and ensuring the activity is enjoyable are essential strategies that can help build a solid foundation for students' long-term engagement in physical activity. Teachers need to be aware of the multiple factors that influence student motivation, as these are essential not only for their current engagement in physical education, but also for instilling a foundation for a healthy and active lifestyle beyond school. In conclusion, motivation in physical education is closely linked to a variety of factors, including teacher behavior, student autonomy, novelty of learning experiences, and satisfaction. The integration of supportive practices and innovative strategies is essential for enhancing student motivation, improving their participation in physical activities, and ultimately contributing to their overall well-being.

Increasing performance in physical education through the integration of technology

The assessment of performance in Physical Education (PE) addresses various dimensions of student engagement, skill acquisition, and the overall effectiveness of educational strategies employed within the discipline. Digital tools have increasingly been recognized as valuable assets in enhancing performance metrics and providing personalized feedback, leading to improved learning outcomes. This synthesis examines the integration of digital tools in PE, their impact on student performance, engagement, and motivation, and the associated challenges within educational contexts.

Digital learning platforms and mobile applications are changing the landscape of PE by enabling personalized learning experiences. A study by Mwangi (2024) indicates that these tools can enhance student performance by allowing learners to progress at their own pace, effectively catering to individual needs and capabilities. However, challenges such as inconsistent internet access and varying levels of digital literacy among educators may impede the widespread implementation of these technologies. Thus, while digital tools present an opportunity for tailored learning, their efficacy remains contingent on contextual factors, requiring infrastructure and educator training to achieve optimal results.

Mobile tracking applications specifically targeting physical activities have shown promise in enhancing self-efficacy and endurance among PE students. Research conducted by Moudettir et al. (2025) illustrates the impact of these applications on endurance running performance and student engagement. The incorporation of such tracking tools facilitates real-time feedback regarding performance metrics, motivating students to set and achieve personal fitness goals. This study underscores the potential for mobile technology to transform traditional PE classes into dynamic and interactive learning environments that strengthen student engagement and performance outcomes. Moreover, the effectiveness of digital tools in fostering student performance in PE is influenced by the pedagogical competencies of educators. A study by Montilla et al. (2023) demonstrates that teachers with high digital pedagogical competence are better equipped to enhance student motivation and performance outcomes in PE. This suggests a reciprocal relationship between the digital proficiency of educators and the efficacy of digital tools utilized in the classroom. Therefore, ongoing

professional development in digital competencies is vital for enhancing educational strategies in PE. In the realm of skill acquisition, digital video resources have been shown to significantly improve the learning experience within PE. O'Loughlin et al. (2013) found that digital video can enhance motivation and provide substantial feedback for skill learning among primary school students. The use of visual aids not only helps in skill acquisition but also augments self-efficacy, thereby improving overall performance in physical activities. This aligns with findings from Jastrow et al., who document the multifaceted benefits—such as motivation and motor skills enhancement—facilitated by digital media in PE (Jastrow et al., 2022). This body of research emphasizes the crucial role of varied instructional methods in optimizing student learning experiences in physical education settings.

The impact of digital tools extends beyond motivation and engagement; they can also play a significant role in assessing student performance. Recent systematic reviews, including one conducted by Knoke et al. (2024), indicate that fitness technologies, including wearable devices and apps, improve not only motor skills but also students' physical activity levels and knowledge acquisition through more interactive learning. This new assessment paradigm represents an important shift, moving towards a more analytical approach to student performance. In this way, educators can gather valuable data that allows them to improve teaching methods and adjust curriculum objectives. However, the use of digital tools comes with challenges, such as lack of technical support and low levels of digital literacy among teachers, which can hinder effective implementation (Sorokolit, 2025). Differences in access to technology can also exacerbate inequalities in education. As highlighted by Abdykerimova et al. (2025), it is essential to invest in specific professional development and infrastructure to overcome these obstacles, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to excel in physical education. Addressing these barriers is crucial to harnessing digital tools to improve performance and engagement. Digital applications also have immense potential to create collaborative and competitive environments in physical education, an aspect that is worth exploring. Studies by Klostermann and Etterlin (2025) show how these digital tools facilitate learning in both cooperative and competitive settings, influencing students' perceptions and increasing overall performance. This highlights

the importance of a balanced approach that encourages both teamwork and individual development, thus responding to the needs of a diverse group of learners. In addition, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into physical education is becoming increasingly relevant. Studies, including Patero's (2023) research on the role of AI in personalizing instruction and engagement highlight AI's adaptive capabilities, allowing for tailored learning paths that may lead to better performance while catering to individual student's needs (Patero, 2023). This innovative approach broadens learning possibilities and suggests future directions for integrating evolving technologies in PE.

Finally, it is important to grasp the psychological aspects that come into play when we use digital tools. The findings of Gracheva and Tyut'Kova (2024) highlight the dual impact of digital environments on academic performance, revealing potential negative effects on students' psychological well-being when not properly managed. This underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between digital engagement and physical activity, ensuring that the psychological health of students is considered in the transition toward more digital educational models.

Conclusions

In conclusion, performance in Physical Education is multidimensional and influenced by various factors, including the integration of digital tools, educator competencies, and the psychological well-being of students. Digital tools hold significant promises for enhancing student performance through personalized learning experiences, real-time feedback, and improved engagement. However, educators must also address challenges such as digital literacy, access to technology, and the psychological impacts of increased digital engagement. Only through a comprehensive approach that encompasses these various dimensions can the full potential of digital tools in enhancing PE performance be realized.

To enhance motivation and performance in physical education using digital tools, educators in Romania need to take a well-rounded approach. This means not only investing in digital infrastructure and resources but also focusing on training teachers and designing a curriculum that puts students at the center. Future research should aim to explore frameworks that seamlessly integrate digital tools into PE curricula while

addressing the unique needs of both students and educators.

The study by Käll et al. (2014) suggests that increasing the quality of physical education should not compromise the time dedicated to academic learning; rather, it can coexist and complement academic performance. This entwinement signifies that digital tools can be instrumental in creating a balanced educational framework that values both physical and cognitive development.

The role of digital tools in enhancing motivation and performance in physical education in Romania is a growing area of interest. While there are notable benefits related to student engagement, skill acquisition, and empowerment through technology, several challenges remain. By addressing these barriers and supporting educators in their integration efforts, Romania can cultivate an educational environment that fosters a love for physical activity, critical for the health and well-being of its youth.

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