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THE INFLUENCE OF TARGETED-SUBJECT RECRUITMENT ON THE RETENTION OF TEACHERS IN PUBLIC JUNIOR SCHOOLS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of targeted-subject recruitment on the retention of teachers in Public Junior Schools (PJSs) in Kenya, with a focus on Nyeri County. The study was guided by Human Capital Theory and adopted a descriptive survey design using a mixed-methods approach. The target population comprised 1,452 respondents, including teachers, Heads of Institutions, and education officers. A sample of 314 respondents was selected using stratified, simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview schedules. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The study achieved an overall response rate of 84.7%. Descriptive findings showed that most respondents perceived targeted-subject recruitment as contributing to the prioritization of hard-to-staff subjects, alignment of recruitment with subject shortages, reduction of teacher shortages, and retention of teachers in targeted subjects. However, perceptions regarding incentives for teachers recruited into specialized subjects were mixed. Pearson correlation results showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between targeted-subject recruitment and teacher retention ($r = .489$, $p < .01$). Regression results also indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between targeted-subject recruitment and teacher retention ($B = .377$, $\beta = .412$, $t = 5.944$, $p < .001$). The study concluded that targeted-subject recruitment was positively associated with teacher retention in PJSs. It recommended strengthening recruitment into shortage subjects and improving incentives and professional support for teachers recruited through targeted-subject initiatives.

KEYWORDS: Targeted-Subject Recruitment, Teacher Retention, Teacher Shortages, Public Junior Schools, Teacher Recruitment, Kenya.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research thesis aimed to examine the influence of targeted-subject recruitment on the retention of teachers in Public Junior Schools (PJSs) in Kenya. It focused on how recruiting teachers into subjects

experiencing shortages could support their continued service in the education system. The study was conducted in the context of ongoing education reforms and the growing demand for qualified teachers in Public Junior Schools across Kenya.

Globally, teacher shortages and turnover remain major challenges to quality education, particularly during periods of increasing enrolment and education reforms (Shaoan, Namanyane, Feng, & Arif, 2025). UNESCO and the Teacher Task Force (2023) emphasized the need to align teacher recruitment, deployment, professional development and retention with curriculum demands. Evidence from high-income countries shows that heavy workloads, inadequate pay, poor working conditions and early-career exits contribute to teacher attrition (Beacher, 2024). Similarly, evidence from low- and middle-income countries indicates that incentives such as wage premiums, housing and hardship allowances can support recruitment and short-term retention, although their long-term effectiveness varies (Crawfurd & Le Nestour, 2022). Local recruitment and targeted incentives have also been used to address staffing gaps in hard-to-staff schools, particularly when combined with professional development and career pathways (Blackmore, Hobbs, & Rowlands, 2024).

In Africa, similar challenges are evident, although they are shaped by local workforce and resource conditions. For example, evidence from South Africa highlights an ageing teaching workforce and geographical inequalities, emphasizing the importance of workforce planning, targeted incentives and strengthened teacher recruitment pipelines (Ngcongo, 2023). Likewise, studies from Tanzania and Uganda show that professional development, school support and hardship allowances influence teachers' decisions to remain in their schools (King, 2024). Furthermore, evidence from West Africa identifies weak teacher planning, limited incentives for rural areas and inequitable deployment as contributors to teacher shortages (Licata, 2024). These findings therefore suggest that recruitment approaches should respond to specific subject and geographical staffing needs while being supported by appropriate retention measures.

In Kenya, these challenges have become more important with the implementation of the 100% transition policy and the Competency-Based Education (CBE), which have increased demand for teachers and created additional subject-specific staffing needs in Public Junior Schools (Makokha, 2024). Consequently, the Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms (PWPER) emphasized the need to align teacher recruitment, deployment and professional support with curriculum requirements (Thukia, 2025). In response, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) has strengthened recruitment through online systems and recruitment guidelines; however, shortages persist in STEM and other specialized subjects, alongside challenges in teacher distribution and professional support (Misigo, Asitiba, & Beatrice, 2021). Moreover, incentives, local recruitment and internship programmes have been identified as approaches that can support teacher recruitment and retention (Pelloni, 2021). Nevertheless, limited county-level evidence exists on how targeted-subject recruitment contributes specifically to teacher retention in Public Junior Schools. This gap creates a need to examine the relationship between targeted-subject recruitment and teacher retention, particularly in Nyeri County, Kenya.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory (HCT), developed by Becker (1964) and advanced by Schultz (1971) and Mincer (1974), views education, skills, training and experience as investments that improve organizational performance. The theory relates to targeted-subject recruitment because recruiting teachers according to their qualifications and subject specialization helps match their skills with subjects experiencing shortages. Such alignment, together with professional development and support, may encourage teachers to remain in schools. Evans and Méndez-Acosta (2023) identified incentives and local recruitment as approaches for addressing staffing shortages, while UNESCO (2024) emphasized working conditions and workforce planning in teacher retention. Thompson-Lee (2025) and Salisu et al. (2025) further found that recruitment incentives are more effective when supported by professional development and in-service support. Therefore, HCT provides a basis for examining how targeted-subject recruitment contributes to the retention of teachers in Public Junior Schools in Kenya.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Targeted recruitment is difficult to measure, but recent literature operationalizes it through indicators such as the proportion of hires in shortage subjects, vacancy fill rates, deployment patterns distinguishing subject areas, special incentives or allowances offered for certain subjects, and retention rates for teachers in targeted versus non-targeted subjects (Solis, 2025). The MDPI review of math and science teacher recruitment and retention emphasized metrics like number of applicants per math post, subject gap size, and years teachers stayed in mathematics or science posts. These measures capture supply-demand dynamics but often fail to integrate broader organisational supports that mediate retention outcomes. Thus, while vacancy fill rates and subject-specific retention provide useful indicators, they risk oversimplifying the complex pathways linking recruitment to long-term workforce stability.

Methodologically, most studies adopt systematic reviews or descriptive surveys, limiting causal inference. Solis (2025) conducted a systematic review of global empirical studies on math and science teacher recruitment and retention, revealing that targeted incentives increase entry into STEM fields but have mixed and context-dependent effects on long-term retention. Similarly, Thompson-Lee (2025) analyzed global STEM recruitment interventions, finding that most strategies were short-term and financial in nature, with uneven results in sustaining retention. However, reliance on secondary sources and global aggregates limits localized insight, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. In contrast, Otieno (2024) in Nandi County used descriptive surveys to highlight deployment challenges, but did not specifically analyze targeted recruitment or its effect on retention. Evidence quality therefore varies: global reviews provide breadth but limited contextual relevance, while African studies offer context but weaker causal designs.

Effect sizes reported in the literature vary considerably. Hanushek, Piopiunik, and Wiederhold (2023) demonstrated that performance-based and targeted recruitment strategies enhance teacher motivation

and retention in OECD countries, but causal attribution to long-term retention remains difficult due to reliance on cross-sectional datasets. Salisu et al. (2025) revealed consistently high attrition rates among STEM teachers, showing that recruitment interventions are most effective when paired with strong in-service support. Contradictions emerge when targeted incentives succeed in attracting teachers but fail to sustain them. For instance, Thompson-Lee (2025) found that financial incentives increased applicant pools but did not guarantee retention unless accompanied by professional development and resource investments. These contradictions suggest that targeted recruitment alone does not secure retention; its effectiveness depends on organizational support, workload management, and career progression opportunities.

A thematic comparison highlights three recurring patterns. First, supply-demand alignment is consistently emphasized. Targeted recruitment helps fill vacancies in shortage subjects, as shown in UNESCO's global report (Teacher Task Force & UNESCO, 2023), but evidence on retention remains limited. Second, contextual constraints blunt effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa. Political interference, uneven deployment, and resource deficits often undermine subject-specific recruitment, reducing its impact on retention (Otieno, 2024). Third, interaction with organisational supports determines outcomes. Recruitment into shortage subjects enhances retention when combined with professional development, induction, and career pathways, but fails when these supports are absent (Salisu et al., 2025). Thus, while targeted recruitment addresses immediate supply gaps, its retention effects are contingent on broader institutional conditions.

Several gaps persist. Conceptually, many studies define targeted recruitment narrowly as filling immediate vacancies, without integrating theoretical perspectives such as Human Capital Theory to explain how investment in subject-specific recruitment could yield sustainable retention outcomes. Methodologically, reliance on secondary data limits causal claims, while descriptive surveys overlook teacher perspectives. Analytically, few studies disaggregate retention outcomes by subject area, leaving unclear whether STEM teachers recruited through targeted strategies remain longer than those in non-targeted subjects. Contextually, most evidence derives from high-income countries, leaving African PJSs underrepresented. These gaps underscore the need for mixed-methods designs that integrate administrative records, teacher perceptions, and longitudinal tracking to establish causal pathways between targeted recruitment and retention.

African studies provide critical insights but remain limited in scope and rigor. Otieno (2024) in Nandi County highlighted shortages and uneven distribution but did not analyze targeted recruitment. Omega et al. (2024) examined teacher modelling and professional development in Kenyan secondary schools, offering valuable insights into mentorship but not recruitment pipelines. Oubibi et al. (2024) in Morocco applied TAM to assess adoption of digital recruitment tools, but overlooked organisational factors influencing retention. Collectively, these studies reveal that while subject shortages are acknowledged, empirical evidence on targeted recruitment's impact on retention remains scarce in Africa. In Kenya, national policy documents (Republic of Kenya, 2023) recognize acute STEM shortages and advocate for targeted recruitment, but analyses remain largely descriptive and

national-level, with little attention to county-level realities under CBE reforms. Localized evidence is therefore essential to understand how targeted recruitment interacts with organisational support to influence retention outcomes.

Human Capital Theory provides a useful lens for interpreting targeted recruitment's influence on retention. By emphasizing investment in specialized skills, HCT suggests that recruiting teachers into shortage subjects enhances their sense of professional value, job security, and utility, thereby supporting retention. However, critiques warn that HCT overvalues measurable credentials while underrepresenting intrinsic motivations and external constraints such as workload and limited budgets (Musoka, 2022). Applied to targeted recruitment, HCT implies that subject-specific hiring can strengthen retention, but only when complemented by organisational supports such as professional development, equitable deployment, and career progression opportunities. Thus, targeted recruitment must be embedded within broader workforce strategies to sustain long-term commitment.

In Kenya, the 100% transition policy and Competency-Based Curriculum reforms intensify demand for teachers in shortage subjects, exposing weaknesses in recruitment-to-retention linkages (Republic of Kenya, 2023; Teacher Task Force & UNESCO, 2023). While national policies advocate for targeted recruitment, persistent shortages remain in STEM and technical subjects. County-level evidence is sparse, and few studies disaggregate retention outcomes by subject area. The current study addresses these gaps by focusing on Nyeri County, adopting a mixed-methods design that integrates surveys, interviews, and administrative records. By linking targeted recruitment strategies to retention outcomes, it provides empirical evidence on whether subject-specific hiring translates into sustained commitment under reform pressures.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews with selected administrators. The approach enabled the study to describe recruitment practices and teacher retention and provided triangulation of findings (Ayiro, 2024).

3.2 Target Population

The target population comprised stakeholders involved in teacher recruitment and retention in Public Junior Schools (PJSs) in Kenya. They included Heads of Institutions (HOIs) manning PJSs, PJS teachers, MOE & TSC County Directors, MOE & TSC Sub-County Directors (SCDEs). Their roles and experiences made them relevant sources of information on recruitment and teacher retention.

3.3 Study Population

The study population comprised teachers and education administrators in Public Junior Schools in Nyeri County. The county had 377 PJSs and 1,434 teachers, including interns and Permanent and

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Pensionable teachers, as of October 2025. The study also included 18 education officers, giving a total target population of 1,452 respondents.

3.4 Sampling Technique

The study used stratified, simple random and purposive sampling techniques. The 296 respondents were proportionately distributed across the eight sub-counties of Nyeri County. Schools and teachers were then selected randomly using lists provided by the county education offices as the sampling frame. Education officers were selected purposively because of their relevant roles in teacher recruitment and retention.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The study used a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview schedule to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was administered to teachers and school administrators and comprised five sections covering demographic information, digital recruitment systems, merit-based selection, targeted-subject recruitment and teacher retention, with items measured on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The questionnaire was pre-tested to assess clarity, reliability and validity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with education officers, including CDE, TSC CD, SCDEs and TSC SCDs, to obtain deeper information on experiences, perceptions and challenges related to teacher recruitment and retention. The interviews complemented the questionnaire findings by providing additional context and were recorded with consent and analyzed thematically.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Response Rate

Table 1 Response Rate

Respondents	Sample	Responded	Response Rate (%)
HOIs	62	52	83.7
Teachers	234	201	85.9
Education officers	18	15	83.3
Total/Overall	314	266	84.7

The study achieved an overall response rate of 84.7%, which is considered excellent in survey research. Teachers recorded the highest participation at 85.9%, followed closely by Heads of Institutions (HOIs) at 83.7%, and education officers at 83.3%. Such consistently high rates across all respondent categories indicate strong engagement, reduced sampling error and enhanced the representativeness of findings.

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4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 Targeted Subject Recruitment

Variable	Parameter	Frequency	Percent (%)
TSC prioritizes recruitment of teachers in hard to staff subjects	Strongly Disagree	10	4.0
	Disagree	26	10.4
	Neutral	43	17.1
	Agree	126	50.2
	Strongly Agree	46	18.3
Recruitment efforts are effectively aligned with current subject shortages	Strongly Disagree	9	3.6
	Disagree	33	13.1
	Neutral	45	17.9
	Agree	110	43.8
	Strongly Agree	54	21.5
Recruited in specialized subject areas receive incentives	Strongly Disagree	20	8.0
	Disagree	60	23.9
	Neutral	51	20.3
	Agree	89	35.5
	Strongly Agree	31	12.4
Targeted recruitment campaigns are well publicized	Strongly Disagree	1	0.4
	Disagree	16	6.4
	Neutral	30	12.0
	Agree	126	50.2
	Strongly Agree	78	31.1
Recruitment policies address regional disparities	Strongly Disagree	6	2.4
	Disagree	20	8.0
	Neutral	56	22.3
	Agree	127	50.6
	Strongly Agree	42	16.7
Targeted subject recruitment has reduced teacher shortages	Strongly Disagree	8	3.2
	Disagree	19	7.6
	Neutral	40	15.9
	Agree	126	50.2
	Strongly Agree	58	23.1
Teachers in targeted subject initiatives remain in teaching positions	Strongly Disagree	4	1.6
	Disagree	16	6.4
	Neutral	53	21.1
	Agree	128	51.0

Strongly Agree	50	19.9

The findings indicated that the majority of respondents viewed targeted recruitment as an effective strategy for addressing teacher shortages, improving regional equity, and retaining teachers, although opinions were more varied regarding the provision of incentives for specialized subject teachers. Regarding whether TSC prioritized the recruitment of teachers in hard-to-staff areas, 50.2% of respondents agreed and 18.3% strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 17.1% were neutral, 10.4% disagreed, and 4.0% strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that while many respondents perceived prioritization efforts, a notable proportion remained uncertain or unconvinced about the consistency of such measures.

On whether recruitment efforts were effectively aligned with current subject shortages, 43.8% of respondents agreed and 21.5% strongly agreed. In contrast, 17.9% were neutral, 13.1% disagreed, and 3.6% strongly disagreed. These findings suggested that while many respondents recognized alignment with subject needs, a notable proportion remained uncertain or felt the efforts were insufficient.

Regarding whether teachers recruited in specialized subject areas received incentives, 35.5% of respondents agreed and 12.4% strongly agreed. However, 23.9% disagreed, 8.0% strongly disagreed, and 20.3% were neutral. These findings suggest that while some teachers acknowledged receiving incentives, a significant proportion either disagreed or remained neutral, indicating inconsistency in how such incentives were applied or perceived.

Concerning whether targeted recruitment campaigns were well publicized, 50.2% of respondents agreed and 31.1% strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 12.0% were neutral, 6.4% disagreed, and 0.4% strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that most respondents perceived recruitment campaigns as adequately publicized, though a small proportion expressed neutrality or dissatisfaction with the level of visibility.

Regarding whether recruitment policies addressed regional disparities, 50.6% of respondents agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed. In comparison, 22.3% were neutral, 8.0% disagreed, and 2.4% strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that while a majority believed policies helped reduce disparities, a notable proportion remained uncertain or unconvinced about their effectiveness.

On whether targeted subject recruitment had reduced teacher shortages, 50.2% of respondents agreed and 23.1% strongly agreed. Conversely, 15.9% were neutral, 7.6% disagreed, and 3.2% strongly disagreed. These findings indicated that respondents believed targeted subject recruitment had contributed to reducing teacher shortages.

Regarding whether teachers recruited through targeted subject initiatives remained in teaching positions, 51.0% of respondents agreed and 19.9% strongly agreed. Additionally, 21.1% were neutral, while 6.4% disagreed and 1.6% strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that most respondents

believed targeted recruitment supported teacher retention, though a notable proportion expressed neutrality or disagreement. Furthermore, targeted recruitment initiatives had contributed to teacher retention in the teaching profession.

Inclusion and teacher distribution were highlighted by teachers' qualitative responses, where many advocated for equitable recruitment and deployment practices by eliminating localization policies and ensuring equal opportunities for all applicants. They emphasized balanced teacher distribution across regions, deployment according to staffing needs, and equal consideration of applicants regardless of their county, ethnicity, or place of birth. Similar findings were achieved by the education officers, whose qualitative views highlighted the importance of recruiting locals to minimize transfer requests and improve retention, while also cautioning against restricting opportunities solely to locality. The officers mentioned incentives such as hardship allowances, improved housing, food provision, and better working conditions which were seen as essential for equitable deployment in rural and hardship areas.

Subject balance was identified as critical, with teachers recommending prioritization of hard to staff subjects like STEM, technical, and foreign languages. They noted the shortage of teachers too in specialized learning areas such as STEM, Music, agriculture, creative arts, and technical subjects. They recommended recruiting and training more specialized teachers, providing adequate teaching and learning resources, strengthening practical learning facilities, and supporting specialized subject delivery through targeted investments proposed higher scoring weights, inclusion of TVET/KTTC graduates, retooling existing teachers, and deploying willing senior school teachers to Junior Schools. On the other hand, Education officers' qualitative responses highlighted subject balance as a recurring issue. Respondents valued targeted recruitment for tackling shortages in science and languages, but warned that overemphasis on certain subjects' risks neglecting others, creating workload imbalances and undermining holistic staffing.

Views from education officers' qualitative responses highlighted that recruitment for hard to staff subjects was managed through targeted prioritization in scoring guides and policy guidelines. Under the theme of fairness, respondents noted that STEM and technical subject teachers enjoyed preference, receiving higher marks than humanities or languages. This prioritization was generally seen as fair since it addressed critical shortages, though some acknowledged that it remained difficult to find qualified applicants, leading to repeated re- advertisements or reliance on part-time staff. Furthermore, in terms of efficiency, direct posting from headquarters was praised by the education officers, for reducing transfer requests and promoting retention. Teachers observed that targeted recruitment motivates applicants and ensures faster absorption into schools. However, systemic challenges, such as shortages nationwide and difficulties in staffing specialized subjects, still limit efficiency.

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4.3 Inferential statistics

Pearson Correlation

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the Targeted Subject Recruitment and Teacher Retention. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Pearson Correlation

Variables	Targeted Subject Recruitment	Retention of Teachers
Targeted Subject Recruitment	1	.489**
Retention of Teachers	.489**	1

Targeted Subject Recruitment exhibited a positive and significant relationship with Teacher Retention ($r = .489$, $p < .01$).

Multiple Regression

Table 4 presented the results of the multiple linear regression analysis

Table 4 Multiple Regression

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.969	0.338		2.868	.004
Targeted Subject Recruitment	0.377	0.063	0.412	5.944	.000
a. Dependent variable: Retention of teachers					

The regression results showed that targeted subject recruitment had a positive and statistically significant association with teacher retention. The coefficient (B = 0.377, β = 0.412) indicated that an increase in targeted subject recruitment was associated with an increase in teacher retention. The relationship was statistically significant (t = 5.944, p < .001).

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Hypothesis Testing

H_{03} was rejected: Targeted-subject recruitment had a statistically significant and strongest effect on teacher retention, confirming that subject-specific recruitment strategies are critical in addressing shortages and sustaining stability in PJSs.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

The section below presents the summary, conclusion and recommendation of the study:

5.1 Summary

Respondents expressed favourable perceptions of targeted subject recruitment as a strategy for addressing teacher shortages and supporting retention. Many agreed that the Teachers Service Commission prioritized hard-to-staff areas, aligned recruitment with subject shortages, and publicized campaigns effectively. Policies were also perceived to address regional disparities, and a significant majority reported that teachers recruited through targeted initiatives remained in the profession. However, perceptions of incentives for specialized subject teachers were mixed, with slightly below average agreement on adequacy. Within contemporaneous perceptions, targeted recruitment was linked to improved teacher distribution, staffing, and retention, though incentive provision requires strengthening. Findings highlight targeted subject recruitment as an influential strategy associated with retention outcomes. Pearson correlation values revealed a positive and statistically significant association between Targeted Subject Recruitment and teacher retention. This indicates that, within contemporaneous perceptions, targeted recruitment strategies for shortage subject areas were linked to higher reported retention levels. Overall, the findings suggest that targeted subject recruitment was perceived to improve teacher distribution, staffing, and retention, though incentive provision requires further strengthening.

5.2 Conclusion

Targeted subject recruitment was perceived as a strong strategy for addressing teacher shortages and supporting retention. Respondents highlighted its role in prioritizing hard-to-staff areas, improving regional equity, and reducing shortages. Correlation and regression analyses revealed that targeted subject recruitment had the strongest positive association with teacher retention among the strategies examined. Pearson correlation analysis showed that Targeted Subject Recruitment ($r = .489$, $p < .01$) had positive and significant association with teacher retention. Targeted recruitment addressed shortages in Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and technical areas, yet retention remained fragile as teachers preferred senior schools. Equity concerns were tied to locality, with local recruitment reducing transfers but inequities persisting in marginalized regions.

5.3 Recommendations

The education sector policy and decision makers should fully embrace and prioritize targeted subject recruitment by enhancing recruitment in shortage subject areas, particularly STEM and other specialized subjects under Competency Based Education (CBE),. In addition, all education

stakeholders, policy and decision makers should invest in workforce planning by providing resources to align teacher recruitment with subject-specific and specific staffing needs in junior schools under CBE, enabling equitable teacher distribution across schools, and regularly reviewing recruitment policies to respond to emerging shortage subjects demands.

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