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Comparative Implementation of School Culture in Senior High Schools: A Case Study of Aceh and West Sumatra

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ABSTRACT

School culture plays a fundamental role in shaping students' character, learning environment, and educational quality. However, limited research has examined how local cultural values influence the implementation of school culture across different regions in Indonesia. This study aims to compare the implementation of school culture in senior high schools in Aceh and West Sumatra. This study employed a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design. Data were collected from two public senior high schools—SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan (Aceh) and SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh (West Sumatra). Participants included principals, teachers, and school supervisors selected using purposive sampling. Data were gathered through observations and in-depth interviews and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal that both schools successfully integrate school culture through four main dimensions: local cultural practices, literacy culture, environmental awareness (Adiwiyata), and religious culture. While similarities were found in literacy, environmental, and religious programs, differences emerged in the expression of local cultural practices, reflecting each region's socio-cultural identity. Aceh schools emphasized Islamic traditions and communal rituals, whereas West Sumatra schools highlighted Minangkabau cultural arts and social values. These practices contributed to students' character development, environmental awareness, and critical thinking. The study highlights that school culture implementation is context-dependent and shaped by local wisdom. Effective school culture requires alignment between national educational goals and regional cultural values to enhance educational quality and sustainability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, school culture is viewed as a key foundation for educational success because it shapes students' character, behavior, and motivation to learn through positive values, norms, and habits internalized within the school community (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Nationally, school culture in Indonesia plays a strategic role in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, and creating a safe, inclusive, and achievement-oriented learning environment (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). Therefore, strengthening school culture is key not only to improving the quality of the learning process but also to building a sustainable and relevant educational ecosystem that meets the demands of today's developments.

School culture is conceptually defined as a set of values, beliefs, traditions, and practices that develop within a school environment and influence how all members of the school community think, behave, and interact (Deal & Peterson, 2016). School culture encompasses aspects such as disciplinary norms, work ethic, communication patterns, and a shared commitment to the educational vision. In the context of modern education, school culture is also understood as a "value ecosystem" that can shape the school's identity and serve as a foundation for character development and the quality of learning (Fullan, 2020). Thus, school culture serves as a moral and social framework that guides the entire educational process toward achieving more effective and sustainable goals.

Research on school culture shows that a school environment with a strong culture can improve academic achievement, learning motivation, and student psychological well-being (MacNeil et al., 2009). International studies confirm that school culture significantly influences leadership effectiveness, teacher collaboration, and the quality of the learning climate (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). In Indonesia, research by Suyatno et al. (2019) found that strengthening school culture contributes to improving student character and learning quality, particularly in the context of implementing national education policies. Overall, previous literature indicates that school culture is a key variable in the success of educational transformation across various regions and contexts.

A key determinant of school effectiveness lies in the leadership of the principal and vice-principal, along with the active involvement of teachers in decision-making (Al-Mekhlafi & Osman, 2022). According to Javornik and Klemenčič Mirazchiyski (2023), several factors contribute to school effectiveness, namely leadership, effective teaching and learning, a positive school culture, parental involvement, and adequate facilities. Furthermore, improving school quality requires the commitment and support of school principals (Irsyadiah, 2021). According to Zamroni (2016), school culture encompasses the norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and traditions that exist within the school environment and are inherited across generations, collectively shaping the mindset and behavior of all school members. School culture is reflected in various aspects such as safety, environmental awareness (Afemikhe et al., 2022). Furthermore, (Liu, 2023) emphasizes that school culture plays a crucial role in shaping norms, beliefs, and the personal development of both teachers and students, while also guiding the school's overall direction and long-term goals.

Although extensive research on school culture has been conducted, there are significant gaps in the literature regarding local cultural integration and cross-regional comparisons in Indonesia. Most studies focus on the relationship between school culture and student character or the general learning climate, but few examine how local wisdom values, such as Acehnese customs or Minangkabau culture, are internalized in school cultural practices (Ramdani & Zuchdi, 2020). Furthermore, comparative research across provinces in Indonesia is still limited, thus not providing a comprehensive picture of the differences in school culture implementation across various socio-cultural contexts (Hidayat & Yusuf, 2021). Yet, regional comparisons are crucial for understanding how local historical, social, and cultural factors influence strategies for strengthening school culture and educational effectiveness in each region.

There are several problems, namely: there is a limited understanding of how local cultural values are integrated into school culture across different regions in Indonesia. The implementation of school culture often faces challenges related to leadership commitment, teacher involvement, and community

participation. Comparative studies between provinces with strong religious and cultural identities, such as Aceh and West Sumatra, are still scarce. Schools also struggle to balance the implementation of national education policies with the preservation of local cultural identity within their school culture.

Several studies have demonstrated that school culture can enhance educational quality and shape student character. (Bayar and Karaduman, 2021) found that school culture positively influences student achievement and contributes to overall school quality and effectiveness see also (Družinec, 2019; Ismail et al., 2022; Clark, 2019). Moreover, school culture has been shown to positively affect school performance (Lee & Louis, 2019) and to correlate with student motivation when it is built on positive values (Wang, 2023). In addition, school culture plays a significant role in shaping student behavior (Abdulrasq Olatunji, 2024). These findings collectively affirm that school culture is a critical determinant in improving school quality (Zamroni, 2016), and Dwiningrum (2019) further highlights that school culture serves as a foundational asset for both quality improvement and the development of student character.

The challenge of preparing students to foster innovation and creativity in this era of disruption requires continuous development of human morality and spirituality (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). School culture is a key factor in improving the quality of education, as a positive school culture plays a significant role in supporting school development. This study aims to explore the implementation of school culture in one public senior high school in Aceh and another in West Sumatra. The research question can therefore be framed as follows: How is school culture implemented in public senior high schools in Aceh and West Sumatra?"

2. METHOD

This study aims to explore the implementation of school culture in one public senior high school in Aceh and another in West Sumatra. The study employed a qualitative method with a comparative approach. The researcher served as the primary data collection instrument, consistent with qualitative research principles. The selection of this school as a research location was based on the unique characteristics of the school. The subjects of the study included the principal, teachers, and school supervisors selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was carried out through direct observation and structured interviews. Observations were conducted in the classroom, while interviews were conducted after the implementation of the school culture. The validity of the data in this qualitative study refers to emphasizing triangulation, member checking, or peer debriefing (Creswell, 2010).

Data collection was conducted through careful observation. Examples of indicators include students' attitudes toward practicing school culture. Observations were conducted twice. The interview stage involved direct and in-depth exploration with informants. Respondents were individuals who had a clear understanding of the research topic. Ten respondents participated in the interview, which followed guidelines focused on the implementation of school culture. Data analysis was conducted using the model analysis approach (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Data were analyzed through three concurrent steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing by interpreting the results of the verified classification so that they can be truly accounted for.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings from the research conducted at *SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan* (Bireuen Regency) and *SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh*, information was obtained regarding the development of school culture as follows:

Table 1. Comparison of School Culture Development at *SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan* and *SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh*

No	School Culture	*SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan*	*SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh*
1	Local cultural practices	*rapa'i* (traditional Acehnese drum), *saman* (Acehnese group dance), *rebana* (frame drum), *ranup lampuan* dance (welcoming dance), Acehnese customs and traditions, traditional musical instruments, *seudati* dance, *top pade* performance, and the preparation of *ranup* (betel nut as a symbol of hospitality)	*randai* (folk theater), *silek* (Minangkabau martial arts), traditional clothing (*baju kurung basiba* for women, *baju guntiang cino* for men), traditional dances (*tari payung* – umbrella dance, *tari indang*, *tari piring* – plate dance), traditional music (*talempong* – small kettle gongs, *gandang* – drums), *baralek gadang* (traditional wedding celebration), and *makan bajamba* (communal dining)
2	Literacy culture	Audiovisual learning, 15-minute reading activity at the beginning of the first period, reading corners, poetry, short stories, library visits, and literacy competitions	Poetry writing, *madding* (wall magazine), short stories, scientific articles, reading corners, public speaking, and drama
3	Adiwiyata culture (environmental awareness)	Tree planting, cultivation of medicinal plants, school gardens, waste management, and related activities	*gotong royong* (collective community work), tree planting, greenhouse development, and the provision of waste bins for organic and non-organic waste
4	Religious culture	*Yasin* recitation, congregational prayers, commemoration of religious holidays, *tausiyah* (religious lectures), prayers before and after learning, *dzikir* (Islamic chanting), *pesantren Ramadan* (boarding activities during Ramadan), and funeral prayer practice	*tahfidz Qur'an* (Qur'an memorization), *seni baca Al-Qur'an* (Qur'anic recitation art), *tahsin* (improvement of Qur'anic recitation), *tadarus* (group Qur'an reading), *infak* (charitable giving), commemoration of Islamic holidays, donations to orphanages, distribution of *takjil* (Ramadan meals), and *pesantren Ramadan*

Source: Authors' elaboration based on primary data (2025)

3.1 Local Cultural Practices

Traditions and customs within a community represent the identity of a social group, with each region possessing distinct practices and values. (Sun, 2025) emphasizes that regional characteristics and cultures differ due to variations in natural environments, geographical conditions, and historical development processes, which collectively shape cultural diversity. (Anwar et al., 2020) further argue that local culture holds essential meaning in community life; if regional culture disappears, the identity and characteristics of the community will also vanish. For this reason, local culture must be preserved. Schools, as educational institutions, play a vital role in introducing regional culture to students as part of cultural preservation efforts. (Arjaya et al., 2024) highlight that local wisdom not only contributes to character formation but also strengthens student identity, perception, knowledge, and morality regarding local culture, while simultaneously supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus, the integration of local cultural practices into school culture demonstrates the dual function of education: preserving heritage and fostering students' holistic development.

Based on the findings from *SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan* and *SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh*, several forms of local culture have been developed, namely: While both schools promote local culture, SMA 1 Peusangan emphasizes Acehnese Islamic traditions, whereas SMA 3 Payakumbuh incorporates Minangkabau communal and artistic practices. These differences reflect distinct regional identities and suggest that school culture must be contextualized within local socio-religious frameworks." "Both schools demonstrated a balance between structured religious programs and informal moral guidance embedded in daily routines, reinforcing previous findings that faith-based practices shape student behavior across school contexts.

In interpreting research findings on school culture, Deal and Peterson's school culture theory serves as the dominant framework. According to Deal and Peterson (2016), school culture encompasses symbols, rituals, traditions, and values that build a school's collective identity. Therefore, analyzing the implementation of school culture requires examining how these components are practiced and lived by school members in their respective local contexts. This model helps interpret differences in the implementation of school culture across regions, such as Aceh and West Sumatra, by understanding that culture encompasses more than formal rules, but also meanings generated from social interactions, historical narratives, and the cultural values of the local community (Peterson & Deal, 2011). Using this theory as a foundation, interpretation of research findings can be more systematic and sensitive to the local cultural dynamics that influence educational practices at the school level.

The findings of this study essentially support the existing literature stating that school culture is a key factor in shaping character and learning effectiveness (Deal & Peterson, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009). However, the results of this study also challenge some of the previous literature by showing that the implementation of school culture cannot be understood solely through a normative or universal framework. This study shows that differences in local cultural contexts such as Acehnese traditional values oriented towards religiosity and Minangkabau culture which emphasizes deliberation result in variations in school culture practices that have not been widely explained in previous research (Ramdani & Zuchdi, 2020).

From the findings, it can be seen that each school has its own programs for developing local culture within the school environment. This is reflected in the arts, traditional clothing, dances, musical instruments, and other forms of local wisdom. Each local cultural practice developed carries its own meaning and value, representing the identity of the community. The development of local culture in schools has a positive impact on shaping students' character. Previous studies (Fitrah et al., 2020; Alawiyah et al., 2023; Hermansyah et al., 2023) confirm that integrating local culture into school culture contributes to character building. Similarly, (Palennari et al.. 2023) emphasize that the integration of cultural values into learning models is highly significant for developing student character. Therefore, effective management and governance from the school are required in order to successfully implement local cultural development. (Kamisi et al., 2020) also highlight that strengthening character education based on culture in schools involves school governance, curriculum, as well as rules and regulations integrated into school activities.

3.2 Literacy Culture

Literacy culture plays an important role in fostering students' interest in reading, as reading broadens their horizons and knowledge. Therefore, schools must be able to develop literacy programs both within classroom learning activities and outside school hours. (Syakila and Dahalan, 2024) explain that literacy culture enables individuals to adapt, communicate, and collaborate more effectively in multicultural environments. Furthermore, (Heru Santosa and Supadi, 2023) emphasize that literacy culture not only increases students' love for reading but also helps build positive character traits such as discipline and courtesy. (Charneidy et al., 2025) also highlight that teacher support and the availability of comfortable reading spaces contribute positively to the cultivation of literacy culture in schools.

Based on the findings from *SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan* and *SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh* regarding literacy culture, the following information was obtained: Both schools actively develop a culture of literacy, but with different focuses and strategies tailored to their respective learning characteristics. Thus, despite the different forms of activity, both schools demonstrate that a culture of literacy can develop effectively through programs tailored to the local potential and strengths of each institution.

Building student literacy has become a necessity in today's era of globalization, as literacy culture enhances students' critical thinking and creativity. The realization of school literacy programs requires proper management so that they positively influence students' reading interest. (Sulfemi, 2023) found a significant correlation between the management of literacy programs and students' reading motivation. Thus, effective management of literacy culture development in schools contributes

positively to student literacy outcomes. Schools are therefore required to design literacy programs that are aligned with students' talents and interests. (Nadifa and Zulvani, 2024) argue that literacy skills enhance critical and creative thinking, effective communication, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to contribute meaningfully to society. Similarly, Adegbola (2023) emphasizes that literacy plays a crucial role at both societal and national levels, as it equips individuals with the essential skills for lifelong learning.

3.3 Adiwiyata Culture

Adiwiyata culture is a program designed to instill environmental awareness in students, thereby fostering a healthy and clean school environment. The Adiwiyata program is part of a national initiative launched by the Ministry of Environment to promote environmental education in line with the regulations of the Ministry of National Education, where all school members are expected to participate in creating a healthy environment and preventing negative impacts on the ecosystem (Nurjanah & Djoehaeni, 2023). According to Rushayati et al. (2023), the success of the Adiwiyata program can be measured by assessing the improvement of students' knowledge, positive attitudes, and constructive behaviors toward environmental issues, as well as the solutions they implement.

Based on the findings from *SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan* and *SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh* regarding Adiwiyata culture, the following information was obtained: A synthesis of findings from SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan and SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh shows that both schools are committed to strengthening a culture of environmental stewardship, but with approaches that reflect their respective local characteristics and priorities. SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan emphasizes conservation-based activities and land use such as tree planting, medicinal plant cultivation, school garden management, and a structured waste management system, demonstrating an environmental culture oriented towards sustainability and utilization of surrounding natural resources. Meanwhile, SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh implements an environmental culture through the practice of mutual cooperation, greenhouse construction, tree planting, and the provision of separate waste bins, reflecting the values of collectivity and tidiness of public spaces typical of the Minangkabau people.

The creation of a healthy and clean environment has a positive impact on the entire school community. (Nada et al., 2021) found that environmental education influences the formation of student character traits such as honesty, self-confidence, responsibility, discipline, care for others, care for nature, courage, religious commitment, and creativity. Similarly, (Syah et al., 2021) demonstrated that the Adiwiyata program contributes positively to improving students' eco-literacy. Therefore, the realization of Adiwiyata programs requires comprehensive efforts to ensure that school initiatives can be maximized. (Utomo et al., 2023) suggest several dimensions for effective implementation, including the integration of environmentally friendly behavior into classroom learning, community-based environmental actions around the school.

3.4 Religious Culture

Religious culture refers to traditions and practices developed by schools to instill religious values in students in order to shape a religious character. (Wening and Hasanah, 2020) state that the development of religious culture in schools serves as a way to cultivate religious values as the foundation of norms, spirit, attitudes, and behavior among school members. (Hayati et al., 2020) further explain that when individuals develop a strong character in relation to their faith, their overall life improves, as religious teachings emphasize not only maintaining a good relationship with God but also with fellow human beings. Religious culture, therefore, extends beyond ritual practices to encompass moral values as well (Zakiyah et al., 2024).

Based on the findings from *SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan* and *SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh* regarding religious culture, the following information was obtained: shows that both schools integrate the strengthening of religious culture as part of the school culture, but with different emphases according to the local cultural characteristics of each region. SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan emphasizes communal-ritual religious practices such as Yasin recitation, congregational prayer, dhikr, tausiyah, and the

practice of funeral prayers, which illustrates the strong influence of Acehnese Islamic traditions that are oriented towards collective worship rituals. Meanwhile, SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh emphasizes the aspect of Al-Qur'an literacy through tahfidz, tahsin, the art of reading the Al-Qur'an, and tadarus, as well as social activities such as infak, donations to orphanages, and distribution of *takjil*, which reflect the values of deliberation and social concern in Minangkabau culture. Although the forms of practice are different, both show that school culture is strongly influenced by local values so that the implementation of religious character education is relevant, contextual, and effective in shaping student identity in each region.

Recognizing the importance of instilling religious values in shaping students' character, schools need to develop religious programs both in extracurricular and curricular activities. As school leaders, principals play a key role in designing programs related to religious activities (Mahira et al., 2024). (Adawiyah, 2023) explains that religious character education refers to the cultivation of moral and ethical values grounded in faith and religious practices. (Iwan et al., 2025) further emphasize that religion-based character education should not only be introduced through formal activities but also through everyday practices that form habits. Thus, the formation of a religious character requires not only formal instruction but also the integration of values into daily life. (Nurkholis and Santosa, 2024) Add that religious activities, such as collective prayers, worship, and charitable acts, can help students experience and internalize religious values in practical ways.

From the discussion above, it can be stated that school culture is a fundamental asset in enhancing school quality and shaping students' character. In addition, school culture is a determining factor in the process of school improvement (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Each school culture possesses its own uniqueness, consisting of both objective and subjective dimensions, including shared beliefs and expectations about school life (Taajamo et al., 2023). As highlighted by Amtu et al. (2020), school culture represents the overall atmosphere of school life, which is reflected in the interactions among all members of the school community. Therefore, it is essential to create a conducive school climate to ensure school effectiveness.

The establishment of a positive school culture is deeply influenced by the quality of leadership within educational institutions. School principals must understand that a strong school culture enhances productivity, motivation, self-confidence, and organizational commitment (Pabalan et al., 2020). Plaku and Leka (2025) further stress that the connection between leadership and school culture is vital not only for internal institutional development but also for shaping the school's broader impact on its community. Similarly, Atasoy (2020) identified a significant relationship between leadership style, school culture, and organizational transformation. These findings collectively highlight that the principal's leadership plays a pivotal role in determining the direction and success of school development. Moreover, school programs that are collaboratively designed and agreed upon by all members of the school community serve as essential elements in the effective cultivation of school culture.

At Public Senior High School 1 Peusangan and Public Senior High School 3 Payakumbuh, the implementation of school culture is realized through both curricular and extracurricular activities. According to Samuel (2024), participation in extracurricular activities plays a vital role in students' overall development, offering numerous benefits such as enhanced academic performance, the development of social skills, and the promotion of a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Similarly, Gulabza Ismatovna (2020) emphasizes that extracurricular engagement provides significant advantages for students, including improved educational achievement, greater self-confidence, stronger peer collaboration, and better discipline.

Cultural values can be applied to foster holistic education in inclusive schools through various approaches that emphasize respect for diversity, character development, and the creation of a supportive environment for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds or special needs (Kinanthi et al., 2024; Bipath & Moyo, 2016). Education should extend beyond mere cognitive growth by fostering social participation and nurturing students' personal character. Achieving meaningful learning requires a revitalization of educational culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016). The success of educational

reform is largely contingent upon transforming school culture, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning (Bruner, 1977; Gazibara, 2013; Lee & Louis, 2019). As Tilaar (2004) points out, education is intrinsically intertwined with culture both conceptually and practically as it shapes individuals to become enlightened and cultured. Cultural dimensions serve as a vital foundation in education because they maintain traditional values while enabling adaptation to contemporary realities (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

The development of school culture varies across schools, and this diversity constitutes a distinctive characteristic of each institution. School culture is a reflection of the overall life of the school (Iyabode, 2021). According to (IÅžIK. Mutlu., 2023), a strong school culture enables students to succeed within a productive educational environment. Similarly, (Krisbiyanto, Afinudin, and Rahajeng, 2024) emphasize the importance of fostering a strong and positive school culture as the foundation for creating a supportive and conducive learning environment. Therefore, it is essential to implement school culture development programs that align with students' needs, as these directly influence school effectiveness. (Bozhani et al., 2025) further argue that a positive school culture encourages and provides opportunities for students to enhance their competencies and self-confidence, thereby contributing to academic improvement.

Implementing 21st-century holistic education rooted in school culture emphasizes that the educational process should prioritize cultivating a positive school environment and producing graduates with strong character and integrity (Musfah, 2012; Ushuludin et al., 2019). Core values promoted within schools include religiosity, leadership, environmental consciousness, and discipline. A positive school culture encourages collaboration among all members based on mutual trust, stimulating innovation, and enabling effective school reform to achieve optimal results (Febriantina et al., 2020). This is consistent with Suriansyah's (2014) findings, which reveal that a strong school culture fosters an atmosphere of continuous learning, learning how to learn, and learning together, instilling the belief that learning is both enjoyable and essential for everyone.

To foster a culture of intellectualism, the process should begin with fundamental practices such as reading, discussion, and writing. This intellectual culture needs to be supported by an engaging and enjoyable learning atmosphere that integrates emotional dimensions into the educational experience (Lee & Louis, 2019). Schools possess the capacity to cultivate their own distinctive culture, one that nurtures a sense of belonging and pride among students (Sutarman et al., 2017). Therefore, school activities should extend beyond academic pursuits to include extracurricular programs that develop students' creativity, talents, and personal interests.

4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that each school demonstrates both similarities and differences in the development of school culture. The primary differences lie in the local cultural practices that are promoted, as each region has distinct traditions that reflect the uniqueness of its community, as seen in *SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan* and *SMA Negeri 3 Payakumbuh*. In contrast, the programs related to religious culture, Adiwiyata (environmental awareness), and literacy culture show considerable similarities across the two schools. Overall, school culture plays a crucial role in improving educational quality and shaping students' character. Therefore, the active participation of the entire school community is essential to ensure the effective implementation of school culture programs. These findings imply that schools should not only preserve and promote local cultural traditions but also integrate them with broader educational initiatives to strengthen character education and environmental awareness. Implications: The findings of this study indicate that strengthening school culture must consider local characteristics so that religious, environmental, and literacy programs can be more relevant and sustainable. Future research may extend this comparative analysis to other regions in Indonesia to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how school culture contributes to educational quality and sustainable development. The recommended that other schools integrate elements of local culture, literacy, environment, and religiosity contextually.

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