

Research Article

Embera Children's Stories: A Strategy for the Preservation of Language and Cultural Identity in Indigenous Education

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Abstract

This study conducted in the Embera ChamfNavera Drua community, located in Darien, Colombia, investigates the impact of children's literature, particularly stories, on strengthening cultural identity and preserving the native language among the community's children. Utilizing a qualitative approach, an ethnographic and participatory action research design was implemented to deeply explore the community's worldview, its educational context, and the sense of cultural belonging developed by the children. The results highlight the importance of intercultural teacher training and the implementation of pedagogical strategies that promote the indigenous worldview through the narrative of stories, which capture the interest and imagination of children. It is concluded that children's stories facilitate the development of a sense of cultural belonging in children, youth, and adults while engaging with their native language. Therefore, it is necessary to train teachers within the community who can link storytelling as a strategy to facilitate the preservation of their language from childhood, allow community participation in preserving their worldview, and contribute to the development of the community's own cultural education.

Keywords

Community, Identity, Dialect, Culture, Intercultural Education, Worldview

1. Introduction

During the last two decades, the educational process of indigenous peoples has reflected a worrying loss of their ancestral roots [16, 31, 32] becoming a problematic global that challenges the preservation of multicultural wealth. [3] Next, it is necessary to mention that in this research problem it is determined that the majority of the 65 indigenous peoples are in danger of extinction of their linguistic orality and the result demonstrates the importance of safeguarding the autochthonous expressions of ancestral peoples, allowing the protection of the knowledge where the identity of the indigenous com-

munities of Colombia is transmitted. This loss of language as a shared essence in indigenous communities has generated international and national reactions to minimize the obstacles present to the revitalization of their cultural practices. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [27] highlights the right to practice and revitalize their traditions.

Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future

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manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, objects, designs, ceremonies, technologies, visual and performing arts and literatures. [26]

In Colombia, the legal framework for the preservation of indigenous cultures is based on a series of laws and regulations that seek to guarantee and promote the cultural and educational rights of these peoples. Initially, [5, 6] the Political Constitution of 1991 constitutes the beginning of recognizing the ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation and placed special emphasis on the protection of indigenous cultures, their languages and traditions. Through Law 21 of 1991, Colombia ratifies ILO Convention 169, committing to respect the cultural identity of indigenous peoples and to promote education that is consistent with their needs and aspirations, which later generated the contribution of the [7, 8] General Education Law of 1994 and Decree 804 of 1995 that complement the bases for proper, intercultural and bilingual education, establishing the existing legal background for the preservation of indigenous culture throughout the country.

The Colombian legal framework, established to protect the Indigenous Educational System (SEIP) since 1996, constitutes the basis on which ethno-education is articulated, focusing on an inclusive and participatory process. According to the Regional Indigenous Council of [2] IP is defined as an educational system "built with the entire community, to guide, plan and manage education in the different reservations" highlighting the importance of a educational management that is based on the needs and visions of the indigenous communities themselves. In this sense, ethno-education emerges as an opportunity to reduce ethnic and cultural discrimination from the Colombian educational system, grounding legal efforts that support the intention of strengthening a proper education that includes, celebrates and promotes indigenous cultural wealth.

One's own education has nothing to do with sitting down to write. This education is part of walking, living, doing. In doing to do. Pedagogues, experts, teachers are not needed. The teachers are the elders, the teachers are the women when they are in the kitchen, when they go to the field, education is when the child is sent to take the donkey and that is why he gets up at five in the morning. Acquire discipline, acquire courage and acquire your own education [14].

Self-education that promotes the indigenous worldview is essential for the empowerment of these communities, highlighting their essential role in the preservation of their language, culture and ancestral knowledge. However, the effectiveness of this education is compromised by insufficient communication and the lack of adaptation of legal and educational policies to the specific realities and needs of each community. This disconnection between legal provisions and their practical application shows an educational model that, at times, is perceived as exclusive and mismatched, as it limits, does not build or integrate [17].

The consequences of this abandonment can be seen in many territories, such as, for example, in the Cauca Valley,

specifically in the Embera Chami Nabera Drua indigenous community in the rural area of R ó Bravo in the municipality of Calima Dari é. This community, characterized by its fabrics, traditional medicine and organic food production, progressively shows the fading of its ancestral customs due to population displacement due to the dispute between armed groups to take over the territory, in a struggle to establish drug trafficking activities. of groups outside the law within their reservation, which leads them to move and live outside their communities. Establishing themselves in large cities, where the ancestral traditions and customs of the members of this ethnic group are violated and the process of language change is faced, is conceived as an example of the little attention of government entities to the cultural needs, health, education, food and recognition of their own territory in indigenous communities.

The fading of collective identity processes is presented as a violent reality that indigenous people must face in their loneliness [18] Where can we fight to safeguard the territory? Why should we lose our identity if it does not harm others? These are some of the questions that the community raises regarding its concern for the care of the territory and the loss of its language and identity, which has coexisted with other cultures in a peaceful way. If the basis of their cultural and territorial identity resides in their language, its preservation ensures the cohesion of the reservation's families and their interaction with the educational system.

Great importance is shown to the protection of the language so that, through it, it can prevail over time as an ancestral knowledge that must be rescued to strengthen and, if necessary, recover the identity of the collective subject, and thus the ancestral practices are not at risk of disappearance due to the loss of native languages [19].



Fountain. Own elaboration

Figure 1. Sidewalk R ó Bravo, Lake Calima reservoir.

Given this need and questions, the national educational system could facilitate self-education so that each indigenous community has a better life, while supporting the care of its language and its territory, however, it encounters a barrier that threatens its identity. cultural: the lack of teacher training in their native language, putting their worldview at risk, a fate that other peoples, such as the Pijao, Caravayo and

Macaguanje, have already faced. Given this panorama and the objective of strengthening cultural identity through children's literature by making use of the native language in their own education, in Embera Cham íNabera Drua boys and girls, the following question arises: In what way does children's literature, in Can self-education motivate Embera Cham íchildren to learn and use their native language, thus strengthening their cultural identity?

2. Materials and Methods

This article is part of a broader investigation, with a qualitative approach, [25] through action research since it is a facilitator of the procedure, like a mediator to provide solutions to problems and conflicts. Besides, which seeks to understand the world from the perspective of the participants, emphasizing the importance of their beliefs, values and motivations [4] It was framed from the interpretive paradigm and its investigative development entails a complementary process arranged in two phases. The first phase, of an ethnographic nature, which allows data to be collected in the natural context, [15] focused on the detailed description of the perspectives and worldviews of the community studied, using participant observation techniques to collect knowledge and needs. related to the preservation of their language through their own education. During this stage, field diaries were used to record the observations, which were subsequently analyzed. The second phase was characterized by the implementation of an action research design, aimed at mediating and resolving identified conflicts, using focus groups to facilitate effective communication with participants and validate the information collected, with the aim of building narratives. relevant and significant [24] about their worldview. The purpose of this methodology is to give the voice to the participants so that they are heard from their experiences and thus, finally, contribute to strengthening the preservation of their language.

3. Results and Discussion

This study emphasizes the perspectives and worldviews of the Embera Cham íNabera Drua community, which acquire meaning from their knowledge and specific needs, establishing sociocultural data related to the preservation of their language through their own education. For this reason, some elements of his speech stand out that refer to his context, worldview and own education.

Within the indigenous community, the importance of revitalizing and making visible the culture within the Embera community is highlighted, since as an ancestral people they have a wealth that needs to be transmitted, in this case through the pedagogical material of stories.

In that sense, it is necessary to understand that indigenous communities, who have been disconnected from educational processes for decades, currently see that it is important for the

academy to implement educational projects that contribute to the care of the ancient culture. This is expressed by one of the community leaders from another reservation, who announces that Western education "is largely responsible for the loss of indigenous languages, since the education of the Western world purges the preservation of using and being able to enjoy the language in indigenous peoples within the classrooms." (Leader of the community).

For this reason, this research work transmits the thoughts of the community who invite other territories to be encouraged in the creation of strategies to promote the inclusion of their language as a creative opportunity to be worked on within their own education taking into account the following categories.

3.1. School Context

In the town of Rio Bravo, historically the need to establish an educational establishment had not been perceived. However, this perception changed due to the need to guarantee that children and youth acquire the necessary knowledge to preserve ancestral traditions. According to Adelmo, community leader (jaibana), in collaboration with Clemencia (current teacher), the Cacique Escobar school was established in the Nabera Drua territory twenty-four years ago. The initiative, led by Jaibana Escobar, initially had the constructive support of the community, and later, with the financial assistance of the energy company EPSA, which allowed the completion of the project. This establishment, far from adopting the conventional classroom structure, is formed as a kiosk that currently serves 46 children in the territory.

Regarding their own language, it is observed that, although boys and girls have the capacity to understand and articulate the language, there is a prevailing tendency toward non-use. This situation has given rise to repeated invitations to take care of it, from the indigenous governor to the mothers, pointing out deficient domestic work in the preservation of the linguistic heritage.

Regarding educators, it is pertinent to highlight that since 1976, through decree 008, it has been stipulated that they must be from the same territory in the indigenous communities of the country. In this context, Clemencia works as an educator for the reservation and is in the process of completing her training as a graduate, which would allow her to access an official position and obtain a salary increase.

In 2023, the school infrastructure benefited from the construction of an artisanal kitchen by the valley government. However, this improvement does not satisfy the numerous needs present, which include the lack of specific educational materials for traditional teaching, such as horticultural tools, paints, threads and beads, essential elements for the representation of their worldview. In addition, the teacher points out the presence of illegal armed groups that sometimes hinder children's school attendance.

This scenario shows the significant needs in rural education

aimed at indigenous communities, particularly with regard to the provision of didactic resources necessary for the teaching-learning process, resources that, despite having been

previously requested, have not been provided by the ministry of education..



Fountain. Own elaboration

Figure 2. Kiosk of the Nabera Drua indigenous school.

3.2. Sense of Belonging to Cultural Identity

At the heart of the Embera Chamí community, education transcends the walls of the classroom to become a vibrant reflection of their rich cultural identity. [13] “indigenous peoples and their languages are not only symbols of identity and belonging to a group, but also vehicles of ethical values” it is from this statement that it is remembered that their knowledge forms a complement to generational survival.

This deep conception of their sense of belonging is manifested in every aspect of community life, starting with the way in which mothers and fathers instill in their children the value of education. From early on, children are accompanied by their parents to school, a journey that not only represents the physical journey towards knowledge, but also a shared journey towards strengthening their cultural heritage. Upon arrival, they are received by the teacher, who is a cheerful woman, mother and leader of the reservation, who in her work supports the transmission of her own language, becoming a facilitator to promote her culture.

Within this educational environment, where mothers play a crucial role, helping in training, as well as in the preparation of natural foods and waiting for their children in their homes near the school, accompaniment and a life in around respect for nature. A particular tree located in front of the school, loved by all, symbolizes the connection with its land and with the teaching itself. This tree is not only a silent witness of daily activities, it is “there where I played when I was little and there they also go to the same thing” (Woman leader of the community) and the habitat of some birds in the area. This element of life has become a reference that is part of the school and its community, is part of the joint memory of the reservation and has accompanied the education of the community for decades.

Around the care of the tree and its lands, the community lives sustainable practices, such as the minimum consumption of products packaged in plastic and a diet based on fruits, natural foods, reflecting the care for the seeds and the quality of their food that makes their lives something more lasting, because “they taught us to take care of animals and nature because then that takes care of us when we eat, that’s why you see us in such good health” (Mother of the community). This community mother agrees on the ecological awareness rooted in her way of life that could be observed as a common practice both in childhood and in adults in the territory. [20] the example is a form of participation in culture, “it is one of the learning modalities of children, since the boy or girl is involved in observing elders or in carrying out the activities of their culture”

It is from the example that education in the Embera Chamí community is also nourished by its context: the flora, fauna and the bright colors of its territory to turn them into pedagogical tools. The colors, shapes and sounds present in their environment beautify their daily lives and are loaded with deep meanings for the community and in their language. When he asked about a very recurring bird, his tongue expressed its reference in a syllabic sound, which in Spanish would be something complex to identify. Out of respect for the information being collected, translation details are omitted; However, one of the results to highlight is the great variety and cultural richness that the community has in its language to communicate, interspersing sounds and gestures that initially went unnoticed in its language. Once the focus groups have started, it can be stated that ethnographic research may be limited in understanding the communities and in communicating with them, it is denoted that their life, in general, is an educational process for which everyone is responsible.

The person in charge at the school of strengthening the teaching and learning processes is a teacher in training, a

Bachelor's student in Early Childhood Education, who knows the Embera language, the Embera Drúa dialect and Spanish. In her work as a facilitator of translation and communication in this research, she states in her reflections that by supporting the collection of information to develop the design of strategies for the children's literature project in the Embera Chamí language, she recognizes the indivisibility of her own language, of the importance of fighting for their culture and the need to create spaces to generate joint collaboration to sow a sense of belonging in boys and girls "(...) the children's literature project in the Embera Chamí language is very good, and one looks how to work the language and culture that they are together to bring out stories told by them, what they think or feel and that is how it works for one to be able to help them" (Teacher of the Community). importance of their work in the process of teaching and learning the native language, as well as the sense of belonging to strengthen cultural identity in the community through pedagogical strategies that reflect everyday life and what happens in their environment.

3.3. Intercultural and Bilingual Teacher Training

The necessary intercultural and bilingual teacher training is accentuated in the context of the Embera Chamí community, especially having only one mother who has continued her university training process. Given the growing access to technology and its influence on the educational and cultural dynamics of the reservation, a possibility is evident in its use to promote bilingualism, defined by the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) [30] as "speaking two languages", "written in two languages" and "that offers words, expressions or texts in one language and translates them into another". In this way, the environment of the children of the community offers an opportunity to mediate bilingualism through technology, since by being exposed to their native Embera language, as well as Spanish, an interaction that promotes strengthening and exploring their worldview as a creative strategy to strengthen cultural identity.

This challenge presents challenges as well as significant opportunities for education in the reservation. A mother from the reservation makes this evident when she expresses her concern about the difficulty of limiting the time her children spend on mobile devices, pointing out that "it is a problem here when the children's phones are taken away because they want to be glued to the phone all day. that and we have to reprimand them" (Mother of the Community). The community's concern for the education of its children, the time and activities they carry out, being part of the good life, therefore, the challenge of thinking about the constructive use of information is transferred to both the community and the teachers. technology, pointing to the care of their life practices as an important part of their worldview.

On the other hand, the teacher in training from the reservation sees an educational opportunity in this technological

reality: "as a teacher I want to learn the ways for them to learn that can help in education, just as you have shown us at the university" (Teacher of the community). This interest in incorporating information and communication technologies (ICT) in the educational process reflects a positive intention for intercultural and bilingual education, where technology can be an ally to strengthen the cultural identity and visibility of the community, using both languages.

One of the reflections expressed by the teacher in training in early childhood education, when accompanying the process of designing strategies to strengthen cultural identity from children's literature using the native language in one's own education, recognizes the inseparability of one's own language, culture and ethno-education as elements that nourish the development of children within the process of their own education. The phrase "we are the ones who educate because no one else comes" (Mother of the Community) reveals the important teacher training process carried out by one of the mothers and that will allow the development of linguistic skills in both languages, because The project is being shown as an example of how to effectively integrate ICT in the classroom, respecting the expression of children, resuming their identity present in their worldview and promoting interaction with their Embera Chamí culture while using their Embera language.

3.4. Generational Transmission of Worldview

The transmission of the Embera Chamí worldview represents a central axis in the perpetuation of their rich cultural heritage. Your worldview is the heart of the world and the river is its veins. [11] The mothers of the community, bearers of ancestral knowledge, tell how they learned from their ancestors, highlighting that Embera Chamí is more than their identity; It is a link that unites them with other reservations that share similar learning. Their own education and the teaching process, deeply rooted in their lives, reflects a collective awareness of the importance of preserving their worldview, even when certain aspects of it must remain reserved, respecting the limits of what can be shared outside their environment. immediate or with the Cajunús or "whites", referring to the peasants or people outside the community.

At the heart of this cultural transmission, as in the case of indigenous groups, the meaning given to their environment by their language goes beyond that, as it also contains essential knowledge about their natural environment, each group has the right to protect and develop their own culture, to have their cultural identity. [19]

In this sense, there is a commitment to community well-being, as expressed by one of the mothers: "we also take care of everything, look, even the chickens are free, but they taught me that from before, when they told you that doing the you learn well and they told me the stories of how the land gave them back the good they did in life" (Mother of the

community). The narrative becomes a tradition that uses language to remember the interdependence of its life, immersed in its environment, with the aim of doing good as a crucial teaching for new generations.

The implementation of children's stories as an educational strategy has received a positive reception among members of the community, resulting in a facilitator of conversation, of their word as a traditional element for the transmission of teachings, where, in addition, writing in the Embera language, leads to the positive use of both communicative resources that impact the learning and emotional expression of children. "This initiative is good, now it is easier for us to help the teacher... and the children seem happy with those photos of the faces and drawing a picture of one at home when she teaches them something" (Mother of the community).

The role of educators in this process is crucial. The focus group as a facilitator of community communication allowed a teacher, a man, from another indigenous community to express himself about the knowledge collected and his opinion regarding the resource under construction for the Embera Cham íDrua community: "here we need to work a lot on the cultural aspects that are experienced and although they are transmitted - because it is one's job as a teacher - it would be important for them to be made visible through pedagogical elements such as primers or drawings" (Teacher of the community). Furthermore, the practice of inviting elders to narrate myths in their native language, although it is not an easy task, is used as an effort of community help in the process of self-education to preserve the worldview: "I call the majority to tell." myths in the mother tongue" (Teacher of the community). Orality and the presence of the elderly in their own education, ensuring that the cultural legacy and their identity is an example in the word that keeps the fight to preserve the Embera Cham ílanguage through their own education.



Fountain. Own elaboration.

Figure 3. Storytelling in the Embera language.

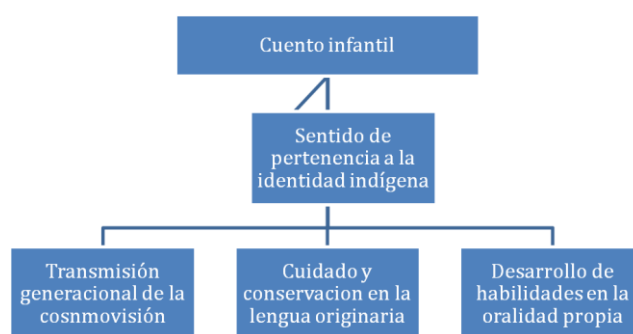
3.5. Why the Story

The story, as an integral part of children's literature, emerges as a powerful tool for strengthening cultural identity

within one's own education, using language as a bridge between generations and as a means for transmitting the worldview, knowledge and beliefs that They are fundamental for indigenous communities. The effectiveness of the story lies in its ability to capture the attention of children and adults alike, thanks to its brevity and structure, which allow it to be read in "not many minutes" [12] or cover no more thirty pages [28] making them accessible and attractive.

There are three beneficial aspects of the story in educational intervention: the didactic, the playful and the ethical [1] From the school context, the story becomes an essential teaching tool that, beyond offering fun and pleasure, facilitates the transmission of specific knowledge and education in fundamental values for coexistence and communication within the community [9] In this sense, the story acts as a mirror of cultural identity, reflecting the traditions, practices, myths and legends that make up the worldview of a people, allowing children to identify with the stories of their ancestors, while strengthening their belonging. to the community and advances in bilingual intercultural teacher training are promoted, relating knowledge, interculturality and community bond in this process [29].

It also benefits from the resource of the story as a strategy, because it provides educators with an inclusive, flexible and powerful pedagogical resource to mediate complex topics in an accessible way and at the same time, promote bilingualism in the classroom. Beyond its classic structure of beginning, development and conclusion, artistic expression and the participation of boys, girls, teachers and the community, strengthens the Indigenous Educational System (SEIP), resulting in a path for the practice of self-education. while strengthening cultural wealth through work with one's own language and the possibilities of using a second language.



Fountain. Own elaboration

Figure 4. Sociocultural elements involved in the creation of children's stories.

Regarding the generational transmission of the worldview, popular stories, characterized by their oral transmission and the anonymity of their authors [21] play a crucial role, since it is in these where a great burden of the essence of the stories is found. communities, becoming the stories that contain much

of the roots of the tradition, but are difficult to date. These stories preserve the ancestral knowledge and the ethical and moral teachings of a community, just as [10] states, telling anecdotes and fantastic or implausible facts is inherent to civilizations, therefore, more Beyond inviting the imagination, stories become the first source to compile knowledge and personify it as an exercise in preserving generational cultural identity.

4. Conclusions

Children's literature, particularly stories, stands out as a valuable pedagogical resource within the Indigenous Educational System (SEIP). [22] mentions that the story of oral tradition, in the indigenous language, has a connection with the cultural universe, and that, furthermore, the oral tradition for these communities is not primitive. For the Embera Cham í Nabera Drua community, the Embera language is the direct means to advance in the strengthening of identity and cultural worldview through self-education and the story is a favorable means to strengthen it. The transition of these narratives to bilingual written formats, according to [27] is essential for the conservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge, guaranteeing that cultural heritage is within the reach of new generations, preventing its disappearance.

It is also a guarantee for the development of linguistic, communicative and literary skills, where reading is promoted as part of one's education. Thinking about incorporating stories into school curricula is something that is already common, however, for the Embera Cham í Nabera Drua community, it is the opportunity to bond to reflect the traditions, myths and ethical lessons of the community, enriching the educational experience and deepening the recognition of their culture. Positive attitudes were presented in a large part of the opinions of the study participants in the focus group, highlighting a very representative one that emerged when delivering the first compilation of stories.

Indigenous education is important because it helps to care for life, and what this education seeks is to continue protecting the knowledge of the majority and the elders through orality, and to see in story books that we ourselves have never experienced., but it makes us very happy that they help us preserve our native language, because that is how we consider it as a language (teacher of the community).

In relation to the creation of the stories and the suggestions to continue with other teaching resources, such as primers in indigenous language and recyclable materials, it can be perceived as a positive attitude towards the research process, where progress is recognized in the process towards conservation. of the cultural identity of the Embera Cham í Drúa

community, within intercultural changes [23] that happen and worry in their communities.

The review and design of teaching-learning strategies is shown as an opportunity to venture into educational research, projecting work with indigenous communities as an opportunity to teach strategies that favor their own education and facilitate teacher training. In this way, a link is generated that allows the strengthening of the transmission of knowledge, contributing to this isolated process that indigenous communities face alone in their reservations.

The connection to this situation that the boys and girls who belong to the Embera indigenous community are currently going through must not continue in ignorance, since this attitude makes the conservation of an ancestral legacy fragile, where the mother tongue and the native of its roots, requires new seeds that accompany the birth of each member of the community to preserve and strengthen the identity they carry in their blood. Under this premise, the research project exceeds the limits of academic teaching to become an action of cultural and social affirmation as a way to resist oblivion and promote an inclusive educational practice with communities.

Despite the forced mobility of some communities towards urban areas and the presence of armed groups in rural areas, the results obtained lead to the conclusion that indigenous communities face as a forgotten community the danger of a generational loss of their language., normalizing violence and oblivion as a condition against which they must fight, with laws in hand, but with educational acts that sow the cultural heritage of their fight for the conservation of their lands and identity.

Given this reality, the research represents an approved advance for dissemination, under consultation towards the strengthening and preservation of the Embera language and as an invitation to explore the stories of other indigenous communities. Despite the distance between each reservation, their language represents the union, and their culture the legacy of their existence. For this reason, in the course of this investigation, it is expected to carry out the consultation process again to request the community's consent for the publication of these stories. While this is happening, it is valid to affirm that at the international and national level, there is a great and invaluable cultural heritage that deserves to be discovered, appreciated and rescued from oblivion to safeguard the legacy for future generations. Following the words of Eabida Wera, "they can take away our land, but never the indigenous", therefore, the unwavering commitment to the conservation of an ancestral language and culture of indigenous communities must be a front toward which future teachers, students and researchers should contribute.



Fountain. Own elaboration

Figure 5. Narrative primer of stories in Embera language.

Abbreviations

SEIP Indigenous Educational System.
ICT Information and Communication Technologies

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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