

Inquiry-Based Learning as an Alternative Instructional Strategy to Enhance Students' Learning Outcomes: A Case Study in Indonesian Islamic Education

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the inquiry-based learning model in improving students' learning outcomes at MA Modern Al-Rifa'ie Malang. Inquiry-based learning emphasizes students' active engagement through questioning, investigating, and independently constructing concepts, thereby fostering deeper understanding and enhancing classroom participation. This research employed a qualitative method with a case study approach focusing on students of class X-B. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, students' learning achievement tests, and supporting documentation. The data were analyzed descriptively to provide a comprehensive account of the implementation process and its impact. The findings indicate that the systematic and sustained application of the inquiry-based learning model significantly improved students' learning outcomes, as evidenced by the increase in the average scores across learning cycles. Furthermore, the model contributed to greater student engagement, enhanced critical thinking skills, and increased learner autonomy in understanding the subject matter. Therefore, inquiry-based learning proves to be an effective and relevant alternative instructional strategy for improving the quality of learning at MA Modern Al-Rifa'ie Malang.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in shaping the character and personality of the younger generation amid the increasingly complex dynamics of modern society (Ahadi, 2025; H. Amin & Aman, 2025; Rochim & Khayati, 2022). The challenges of globalization, technological advancement, and moral crises emerging across various social strata demand an educational approach that is not merely oriented toward the acquisition of knowledge, but also toward the formation of values, attitudes, and spirituality (Brooks & Normore, 2010; Jarvis, 2006; Sahin, 2018). IRE serves as a crucial instrument because it substantively instills values of faith, morality, and social responsibility that are relevant to communal life. Various social phenomena, such as the increasing prevalence of deviant behavior among adolescents, indicate that value-based education has not yet been optimally implemented. This condition reinforces the urgency of research in the field of IRE, particularly in relation to classroom learning processes. Through effective and meaningful IRE instruction, schools are expected to contribute to the development of individuals who are faithful, morally upright, and adaptable to the demands of changing times (Fuller & Unwin, 2009; Hasan, 2025; Jackson & Everington, 2017). Therefore, this research is important not only for the field of education but also for society at large as a preventive effort against moral degradation.

Despite its noble objectives, the reality in society indicates that the implementation of IRE still faces various fundamental challenges. One of the main issues is the low effectiveness of IRE instruction in fostering deep and sustainable understanding among students. Learning practices often remain verbalistic, teacher-centered, and focused on rote memorization rather than encouraging active student engagement (Callahan, 2012; M.-K. Chen et al., 2025; Khan, 2024). As a result, the values conveyed are not fully internalized in students' daily behavior. Furthermore, dense curricular demands and teachers' limited

pedagogical competence in developing innovative learning models exacerbate these challenges. These problems have a direct impact on low learning outcomes, particularly in fiqh subjects that require both conceptual and practical understanding. If such conditions persist, IRE risks losing its relevance as a medium for character formation. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to identify more effective and contextual learning solutions.

Field observations reveal that the learning process of IRE, especially fiqh instruction, continues to encounter various practical obstacles. In many madrasahs, fiqh is predominantly taught through lecturing and written assignments, providing limited opportunities for students to think critically and discover concepts independently. This condition is also evident at MA Modern Al Rifa'ie Gondanglegi Malang, where teachers rely primarily on the 2013 Curriculum fiqh textbook and the classical text *Fathul Qorib* as the main learning resources. Although these materials are rich in content, students often experience difficulties in understanding fiqh concepts in a deep and applicable manner. Student participation in learning activities remains relatively low, classroom discussions are underdeveloped, and learning outcomes have not reached optimal levels. This phenomenon indicates a gap between the intended objectives of fiqh instruction and actual classroom practices. Therefore, a learning model is needed that actively engages students and connects fiqh material with their cognitive processes and learning experiences.

Numerous previous studies have examined the importance of innovative learning models in improving IRE learning outcomes. Several studies demonstrate that active learning models, such as problem-based learning and cooperative learning, can enhance students' motivation and comprehension (Ghufron & Ermawati, 2018; Lin, 2017; Majdi et al., 2025; TeKippe, 2017). Inquiry-based learning has also been widely studied as an approach that emphasizes students' active involvement in discovering concepts through observation, questioning, and

critical thinking. Educational experts argue that inquiry encourages students to construct knowledge independently, thereby making learning more meaningful (Keys & Bryan, 2001; Lee, 2011; Muukkonen & Lakkala, 2009; Sandoval, 2005; Sandoval & Reiser, 2004). However, most of these studies focus on general subjects or IRE in a broad sense, without specifically examining the application of inquiry-based learning in fiqh instruction grounded in classical Islamic texts. Moreover, research contexts are often limited to general schools rather than madrasahs, which possess distinctive characteristics in religious education. This indicates that further in-depth investigation into the application of inquiry-based learning in fiqh instruction within madrasah settings is still needed.

Although inquiry-based learning has been extensively researched, significant research gaps remain. First, many studies focus primarily on quantitative improvements in learning outcomes without examining the learning processes occurring in the classroom (F. Chen & Chen, 2025; Khalaf et al., 2018; Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016; Sam, 2025). Second, there is limited research integrating inquiry-based learning with the use of classical fiqh texts as primary learning resources. Third, the context of modern Islamic senior high schools that combine the national curriculum with pesantren traditions has rarely been explored. These limitations result in an incomplete understanding of how inquiry-based learning can be effectively implemented in fiqh instruction. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the application of inquiry-based learning in fiqh classes at MA Modern Al Rifa'ie Gondanglegi Malang. Accordingly, this research is expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the discourse on fiqh learning and practically by assisting teachers in developing more contextual and effective instructional strategies.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of inquiry-based learning with fiqh instruction grounded in classical Islamic texts within a modern madrasah context. This research does not merely assess learning outcomes but also

emphasizes students' cognitive processes, active engagement, and ability to independently discover Islamic legal concepts. This approach is crucial because fiqh is not merely normative knowledge but serves as practical guidance for daily life. Through inquiry-based learning, students are encouraged to understand legal evidence, context, and application more comprehensively. The state of the art of this research also lies in its institutional context, namely a madrasah that integrates formal curricula with classical Islamic scholarly traditions. The urgency of this study is further strengthened by the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Therefore, this research is important to pursue as an effort to develop fiqh learning models that are relevant to contemporary educational needs.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study focuses on how inquiry-based learning is implemented in fiqh instruction at MA Modern Al Rifa'ie Gondanglegi Malang and the extent to which this model can improve students' learning outcomes. The main argument of this research is that inquiry-based fiqh instruction can enhance students' conceptual understanding and active engagement more effectively than conventional learning approaches. Through inquiry, students are not merely recipients of information but are actively involved in the processes of discovering, analyzing, and drawing conclusions about fiqh concepts. The tentative answer proposed in this study is that the implementation of inquiry-based learning grounded in classical fiqh texts can improve learning outcomes while fostering critical and responsible attitudes among students. The findings of this research are expected to serve as a reference for the development of IRE instruction, particularly in fiqh, and to provide practical recommendations for madrasah teachers in selecting and implementing more effective and meaningful learning models.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because this research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of implementing the inquiry-based learning model in fiqh instruction, including the dynamics of interaction between teachers and

students, the instructional strategies employed, and students' responses during the learning process. The case study design was chosen because the research focuses on a single, specific, and unique context that is bounded by time and place (Luck et al., 2006; Mills et al., 2017; Ridder, 2017; Yin, 1982). A case study allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon holistically and contextually, thereby generating a comprehensive understanding of inquiry-based learning practices in fiqh instruction. Through this design, the researcher not only describes what occurs in the classroom but also analyzes how and why the inquiry-based learning model is implemented and examines its implications for students' learning processes and outcomes.

The research was conducted at MA Modern Al Rifa'ie Gondanglegi Malang. The selection of this research site was based on several academic considerations. First, this madrasah is an educational institution that integrates the national curriculum with classical Islamic scholarly traditions, particularly in fiqh instruction. Second, the institution has implemented an inquiry-based learning model in its fiqh teaching practices, making it highly relevant to the focus of this study. Third, the availability of adequate data sources, including fiqh teachers, students, and instructional documents, enables the researcher to obtain rich and in-depth data. Fourth, the accessibility of the research site and the openness of the institution to research activities further supported the selection of this location.

Data collection techniques in this study consisted of observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010; Roller, 2020; Romero et al., 2019; Rutakumwa et al., 2020). Observations were conducted directly during fiqh learning activities in the classroom to collect data on the implementation of the inquiry-based learning model, teacher-student interactions, and students' learning activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with fiqh teachers and selected students as key informants to explore their perspectives, experiences,

and perceptions regarding the use of inquiry-based learning. In addition, documentation was used to complement the research data, including lesson plans, fiqh teaching materials, students' learning evaluation results, and other relevant supporting documents. The use of multiple data collection techniques was intended to obtain comprehensive and complementary data.

Data analysis in this study was carried out interactively and continuously, following the stages of data condensation, data display, and data verification or conclusion drawing (Bingham, 2023; Miles et al., n.d.). Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation (Malterud, 2012; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010; Ranney et al., 2015). The reduced data were then presented in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships among the data. The next stage involved data verification, in which tentative conclusions were drawn and subsequently re-examined against the available data until valid and consistent conclusions were achieved. This analytical process was conducted continuously throughout the research.

To ensure data trustworthiness, this study employed several credibility checking techniques, including triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement (M. E. K. Amin et al., 2020; Ang et al., 2016; Birt et al., 2016; Kornbluh, 2015; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from different sources and data collection methods (Heale & Forbes, 2013; Kern et al., n.d.; Schlunegger et al., 2024; Thurmond, 2001). Member checking was carried out by confirming the research findings with the informants to ensure consistency between the data and their actual experiences. In addition, prolonged engagement was implemented through careful and repeated observations to achieve a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Through the application of these techniques, the data generated in this study are expected to demonstrate a high level of credibility and trustworthiness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Inquiry-Based Learning as an Alternative Instructional Strategy to Improve Student Learning Outcomes

The implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) in Fiqh instruction functions as an alternative instructional strategy to enhance students' learning outcomes, both cognitively and participatively. In practice, IBL is manifested through a series of learning activities that actively engage students in questioning, seeking information, discussing, drawing conclusions, and presenting their findings. This model positions the teacher as a facilitator and guide, while students act as active subjects of learning who independently construct their understanding of Fiqh content. In this study, the implementation of IBL was not only measured through improvements in students' academic achievement but also through observable changes in learning behaviors, such as increased participation in discussions, improved collaboration skills, greater confidence in expressing opinions, and deeper engagement in reflective learning processes. Thus, this sub-finding represents a learning practice that simultaneously emphasizes both process-oriented and outcome-oriented dimensions.

Table 1. Informants' Perceptions of the Implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning

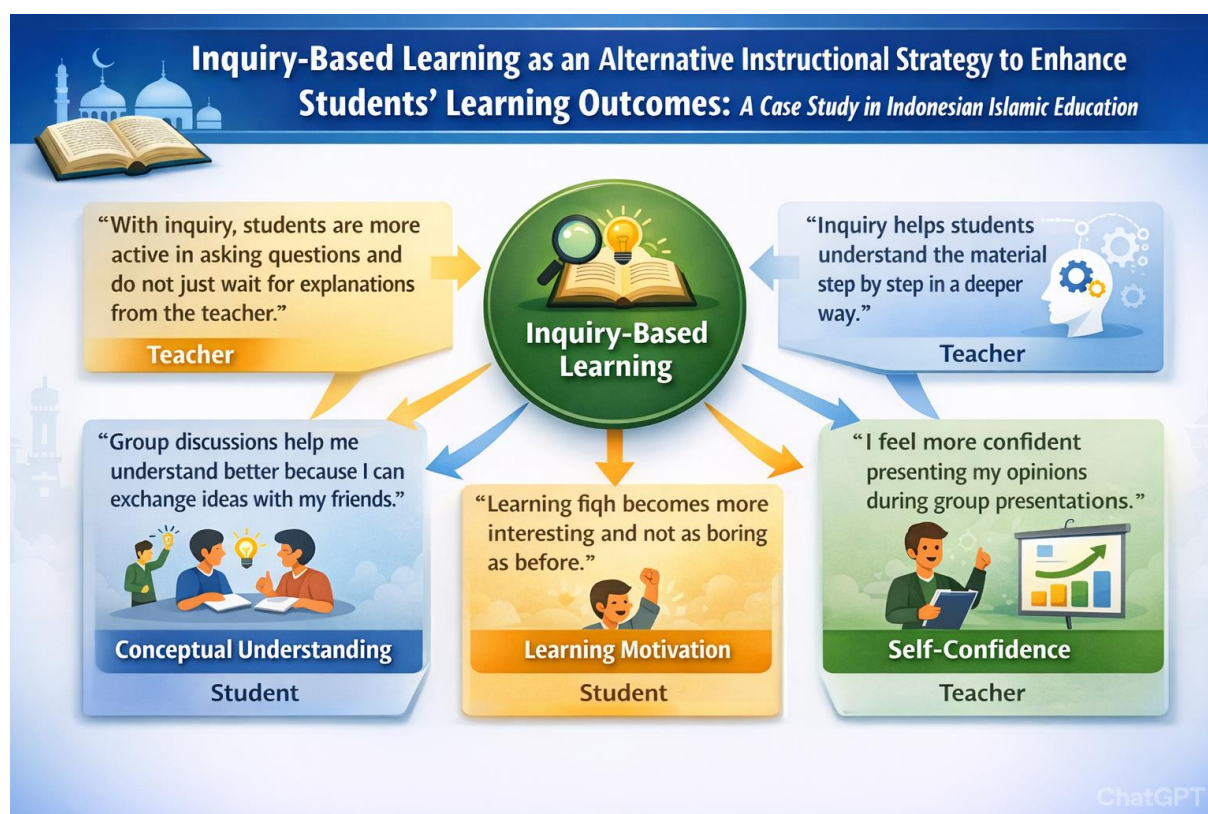
Interview Excerpt	Indicator	Informant
"With the inquiry model, students become more active in asking questions and no longer wait passively for the teacher's explanation."	Learning activeness	Fiqh teacher
"Group discussions help me understand better because I can exchange ideas with my classmates."	Conceptual understanding	Student
"Learning Fiqh becomes more interesting and less boring than usual."	Learning motivation	Student
"I feel more confident expressing my opinions during group presentations."	Self-confidence	Student
"Inquiry helps students understand the material gradually and more deeply."	Meaningful learning	Fiqh teacher

The interview data indicate that the implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning consistently has a positive impact on the dynamics of Fiqh instruction. Increased student activeness signifies a paradigm shift from teacher-centered learning toward student-centered learning. Indicators such as activeness, motivation, and students' confidence in expressing opinions demonstrate that IBL creates a participatory and democratic learning environment. This is particularly important in the context of Fiqh instruction, which has traditionally tended to be normative and text-based. Through inquiry, students are not merely recipients of Islamic legal concepts but are actively involved in discovering meaning and relevance in relation to their everyday lives.

Furthermore, the data suggest that IBL contributes significantly to meaningful learning. Students' conceptual understanding developed through discussion and presentation indicates that knowledge is no longer superficial or limited to rote memorization. Teachers perceive inquiry as an effective means of supporting students' gradual, systematic, and reflective understanding of the material. This finding reinforces the notion that successful learning is determined not solely by final assessment scores but also by the quality of cognitive processes experienced by students throughout the learning activities.

Classroom observations further corroborate the interview findings. During the implementation of IBL, there was a noticeable increase in students' participation in group discussions, the intensity of peer interactions, and students' involvement in presenting discussion outcomes. In the second cycle, students appeared more prepared, confident, and focused in completing learning tasks. Teachers were also more active in providing guidance and motivation, while classroom time management became more effective. The increase in the class average score from 65.77 in the pre-intervention stage to 78.33 in the second stage indicates that improvements in the learning process were directly aligned with enhanced learning outcomes.

Overall, the research findings demonstrate that Inquiry-Based Learning is an effective alternative instructional strategy for improving learning outcomes in Fiqh education. This model encourages students to be active, think critically, and engage directly in the learning process. Improvements in academic scores, motivation, and student activeness provide empirical evidence that inquiry-based learning can address the limitations of conventional, passive, and teacher-centered instructional approaches. Accordingly, the implementation of IBL at MA Modern Al Rifa'ie Gondanglegi Malang has been shown to have a positive impact on both the quality of instruction and students' learning outcomes.



Picture 1. "The Relationship between Inquiry-Based Learning, Student Engagement, and Improved Learning Outcomes"

The main pattern emerging from the data reveals a consistent relationship between the implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning, increased student activeness, and improved learning outcomes. The higher the level of student engagement in discussion and inquiry processes, the greater the improvement in

conceptual understanding and academic achievement. This pattern confirms that active and reflective learning processes are key factors in enhancing the quality of Fiqh instruction.

Table 2. The Ideal Influence of Inquiry-Based Learning on Fiqh Instruction

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Fiqh teacher	"Inquiry prevents students from being passive and makes them more responsible for their own learning."	Learning autonomy
Homeroom teacher	"Students appear more confident and active during the learning process."	Self-confidence
Student	"I find it easier to understand the material because I search for the answers myself."	Deep understanding
Student	"Group learning makes me more enthusiastic."	Learning motivation

This table illustrates that the ideal influence of Inquiry-Based Learning extends beyond academic achievement to include students' affective and social dimensions. Learning autonomy and self-confidence emerge as dominant indicators reflecting the success of inquiry-based instruction. Teachers and homeroom teachers observe that students become more responsible for their own learning processes, while students themselves experience increased motivation and understanding.

Moreover, students' involvement in independently discovering answers strengthens the internalization of Fiqh concepts. The inquiry process enables students to connect instructional content with their learning experiences, making learning more contextual and relevant. These findings indicate that IBL not only improves academic performance but also contributes to the development of positive learning character traits among students.

The overall data pattern demonstrates a consistent sequence: Inquiry-Based Learning → Student Activeness → Conceptual Understanding → Improved Learning Outcomes. When students are actively engaged in the learning process, increases in motivation and conceptual understanding occur, which directly

influence learning achievement. This pattern reinforces the position of Inquiry-Based Learning as an ideal alternative instructional strategy within the context of Islamic education in madrasah settings.



Picture 2. The Influence of Inquiry-Based Learning on Fiqh Learning

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) in Fiqh instruction effectively enhances students' learning outcomes through increased activeness, conceptual understanding, and motivation. These findings are consistent with prior studies on inquiry-based and student-centered learning, which emphasize that active engagement in questioning, investigation, and discussion fosters deeper understanding and meaningful learning (Acar, 2018; Brookes & Ektina, 2020; Morris, 2025; Sam, 2025). Previous research in general education contexts has shown that IBL promotes critical thinking, learner autonomy, and long-term knowledge retention. This

study extends those findings by confirming their applicability within the context of Islamic education, particularly in Fiqh instruction, which has traditionally relied on teacher-centered and text-based approaches. The alignment between this study and existing literature suggests that the core principles of inquiry-based learning are transferable across disciplines and educational contexts, including religious education.

However, this study also reveals important contextual distinctions that contribute to the existing body of literature. While many previous studies focus on inquiry-based learning in science or general subjects, the present research demonstrates how IBL can be effectively integrated into Fiqh instruction that combines a national curriculum with classical Islamic texts. Unlike studies that treat inquiry merely as a cognitive strategy, this research highlights its role in transforming students' learning behavior, including increased confidence, motivation, and responsibility for learning. This finding suggests that IBL not only enhances academic achievement but also supports affective and social development, which are essential goals of Islamic education (Ernawati, 2025; Hafizoh et al., 2025). In this regard, the study offers a nuanced perspective that complements and enriches existing research by situating inquiry-based learning within the moral and spiritual objectives of Fiqh education.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction, reflection, and experience. The observed shift from passive reception to active meaning-making among students confirms that learning occurs more effectively when learners are directly involved in the inquiry process (Hartikainen, n.d.; Thomas et al., 2025). This study reinforces the view that meaningful learning is not solely determined by assessment outcomes but by the quality of cognitive and reflective processes experienced during instruction (F. Chen & Chen, 2025; Clark, 2011; Hartikainen, n.d.; Huang et al., 2011; Kostianen, 2018; Shumway et al.,

2003). In the context of Islamic education, this theoretical implication is significant because it challenges the assumption that normative and doctrinal subjects must be taught through transmissive methods. Instead, the findings suggest that inquiry-based approaches can coexist with, and even strengthen, the transmission of religious knowledge.

The practical implications of this study are equally substantial. For teachers, the findings indicate that adopting IBL can improve classroom dynamics, increase student participation, and enhance learning outcomes without compromising the integrity of Fiqh content. Teachers are encouraged to shift their roles from sole knowledge transmitters to facilitators who guide students in exploring, questioning, and interpreting Islamic legal concepts. For educational institutions, particularly madrasahs such as MA Modern Al Rifa'ie Gondanglegi Malang, the study provides empirical evidence that innovative instructional strategies can be effectively implemented within existing curricular frameworks. This has implications for teacher training, curriculum development, and instructional policy aimed at improving the quality of Islamic education.

In conclusion, the findings of this study affirm that Inquiry-Based Learning serves as a viable and effective alternative instructional strategy for enhancing learning outcomes in Fiqh education. The consistent pattern identified Inquiry Based Learning leading to increased student activeness, deeper conceptual understanding, and improved academic achievement underscores the central role of active and reflective learning processes. By aligning theoretical principles with practical classroom application, this study contributes to the growing discourse on pedagogical innovation in Islamic education. It highlights the potential of IBL to address longstanding challenges in Fiqh instruction and positions inquiry-based learning as a strategic approach for fostering both intellectual competence and positive learning character among students in madrasah settings.

CONCLUSION

Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is an effective alternative instructional strategy for improving students' learning outcomes in Fiqh, both cognitively and participatively. A key insight of this research is that Fiqh instruction need not remain normative, text-centered, and teacher-dominated; instead, it can be transformed into an active, reflective, and contextual learning process. The implementation of IBL significantly enhances student engagement, conceptual understanding, motivation, and self-confidence, leading to measurable improvements in academic achievement. The consistent pattern identified—Inquiry-Based Learning → Student Activeness → Conceptual Understanding → Improved Learning Outcomes—demonstrates a direct relationship between the quality of the learning process and learning outcomes, confirming the relevance of IBL for 21st-century Islamic education.

The strength of this study lies in its scholarly contribution to Islamic education pedagogy, particularly Fiqh instruction, by reinforcing constructivist learning theory within a religious education context. Empirically, the study provides contextual evidence that IBL can be effectively implemented in madrasah settings that integrate national curricula with classical Islamic scholarship. Practically, it offers an applicable instructional model that supports both academic achievement and the development of positive learning behaviors among students.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. It was conducted within a limited context in terms of participants and research setting, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study primarily focuses on short-term learning outcomes and does not examine the long-term impact of IBL on religious character formation and value internalization. Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger samples, employ mixed-methods or quasi-experimental designs, and explore the long-term effects of

Inquiry-Based Learning on students' religious, moral, and social development across diverse Islamic educational contexts.

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