

ANALYSIS OF SEMANTIC CONCEPTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE LITERACY COMPETENCIES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Okta Vitriani¹, Hayati Azizah², Sayyid Abdul Munir³
{25204081007@student.uin-suka.ac.id¹, 25204081006@student.uin-suka.ac.id²,
25204081008@student.uin-suka.ac.id³}

UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta^{1,2,3}

Abstract. This study aims to analyze semantic concepts in the development of Indonesian literacy competencies of elementary school students. This research is motivated by the low ability of students to understand the meaning of texts and apply semantic concepts in language activities. The research uses the systematic literature review (SLR) method by searching Sinta and Google Scholar indexed articles for the period 2015–2025 that are relevant to semantics and literacy topics in elementary schools. The results of the analysis show that semantics plays an important role in the formation of text meaning, vocabulary mastery, and the ability to compose sentences effectively. Semantic learning models such as concept maps, contextual meaning analysis, and contextual word games have been proven to be effective in improving students' critical thinking skills and understanding of meaning. These findings are in line with the principles of the independent curriculum which emphasizes meaning- and text-based learning. This study concludes that semantic reinforcement needs to be supported by the active role of teachers, adaptive curriculum, and contextual learning media to build meaningful literacy in elementary school students.

Keywords: Indonesian; Independent Curriculum; Literacy; Primary school; Semantics

INTRODUCTION

Basic education is an important foundation in developing students' competencies, one of which is through strengthening literacy. Literacy is not just the ability to read and write, but also includes the ability to understand, analyze, and use language effectively in a variety of contexts. The government's efforts through programs such as the School Literacy Movement (GLS) and the implementation of the independent curriculum show that literacy is considered an important element in achieving 21st century competencies and Pancasila student profiles. In the digital era and globalization, students are required not only to master printed text, but also to be able to interpret information in the form of multimedia and *cross-platform* communication.

However, literacy indicators in elementary school (SD) students in Indonesia show that there are still significant challenges. For example, the results of the analysis of the implementation of reading literacy show that the reading culture in elementary schools is still low and this has an impact on students' reading skills. This condition is exacerbated by a low understanding of the meaning of the text, not only reading word for word but also interpreting the context and implicit meaning. This shows that the semantic aspect in Indonesian learning has not received adequate attention at the elementary level.

The semantic aspect that studies meaning in language at the level of words, phrases, sentences, and discourse has a strategic role in the development of literacy. Linguistic theory shows that semantic understanding helps learners connect new vocabulary with existing knowledge, recognize the relationship of meaning between terms, and make inferences to understand implicit meanings in texts. Thus, semantic teaching can strengthen students' ability to not only recognize words but also understand their meaning and context in a broader discourse.

Based on the results of research conducted by (Manik, 2020) and strengthened by (Mukhera et al., 2025), the semantic ability of elementary school students, especially in the aspect of lexical meaning, is still relatively low. Of the 30 elementary school grade V students who were tested through the word meaning and meaning relationship understanding test, an average score of 64.3 was obtained

with the category "adequate", while the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) set by the school was 75. Only 26.7% of students achieved scores above the KKM, while the other 73.3% were not able to explain the meaning of words in depth or distinguish denotative and connotative meanings correctly. The analysis of question items showed that the most errors occurred in the indicators of understanding idiomatic meaning (average score of 58) and contextual meaning (average score of 61).

These findings show that semantic learning in elementary schools has not been explicitly structured, so students do not have adequate semantic skills to support Indonesian literacy skills as a whole. Therefore, the integration of systematic and contextual semantic learning activities is very important in Indonesian learning in elementary schools.

In addition, a literature review revealed that research that specifically examined the relationship between semantics and literacy at the elementary level is still limited. Most literacy studies focus on reading frequency, reading interest, or general reading strategies, while the meaning (semantics) aspect often appears as a small part of the broader study. This imbalance shows that there are important research gaps to be filled, especially in the form of systematic studies that explore semantic concepts and their implementation in the development of Indonesian literacy competencies.

Based on this description, it can be seen that the mastery of literacy at the elementary school level still faces challenges, especially in terms of understanding the meaning and semantic abilities of students. In fact, the semantic aspect has an important role in helping students understand the context and meaning of language in its entirety. The low attention to this aspect indicates the need for a more in-depth study of the relationship between semantics and literacy in Indonesian language learning in elementary schools.

Therefore, this study focuses on the Analysis of Semantic Concepts in the Development of Indonesian Literacy Competency for Elementary School Students. This study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of applied linguistics studies as well as practical benefits for teachers and curriculum developers in designing Indonesian learning that is more meaningful, contextual, and in line with the spirit of the independent curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research type with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. The syntax of SLR research in this study refers to the stages proposed by (Kitchenham and Charters, 2007), namely identification of research problems, planning and determination of study protocols, literature search, selection and assessment of article quality, extraction and synthesis of data, and reporting of study results. The data collection process began by tracing various relevant literature sources from Sinta 1–4 indexed journals and Google Scholar to obtain articles published in 2015–2025 that discussed the topic of semantics and Indonesian literacy in elementary schools. The articles were then selected based on inclusion criteria, which discussed semantics and language literacy aspects, focused on the context of basic education, and were fully accessible. The SLR stage includes an identification and screening process to remove duplication and ensure the relevance of the topic, followed by a feasibility evaluation to assess methodological quality and thematic suitability. Furthermore, information is extracted to collect key data such as the objectives, methods, results, and implications of each selected study. After that, data synthesis was carried out to find patterns of linkages and thematic tendencies between literatures. The data analysis in this study uses content *analysis techniques* as stated by (Krippendorff, 2018), namely data reduction, data presentation, verification, and theme interpretation.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

1.1 Conceptual Findings

1.1.1 The role of semantics in understanding the meaning of texts

The results of the literature review show that semantics has a central role in helping students understand the meaning of texts in depth. Understanding meaning is not only limited to the recognition of words or sentences, but also includes the ability to interpret the relationship of meaning between parts of the text and their context. According to (Chaer, 2015), semantics allows one to understand the lexical meanings and grammatical meanings that make up the overall meaning of language. Thus, Indonesian learning in elementary school does not focus enough on the ability to read surfaces, but must be directed at the formation of *meaning awareness* through mastery of semantic concepts.

The results of a study conducted by (Nisak, Basyar, and Arisyanto, 2020) show that students who receive learning based on meaning analysis have the ability to understand the content of reading better than students who only use the literal reading method. Semantic understanding helps learners recognize meaning relationships such as synonyms, antonyms, and polysememes that often appear in texts, so that they can draw conclusions about meaning contextually. This is in line with the principles of the independent curriculum which emphasizes the importance of understanding concepts and context in reading, not just memorizing or copying information. Thus, strengthening semantic aspects can be one of the effective strategies to improve the ability to understand the meaning of texts in elementary school students.

1.1.2 The relationship between the mastery of lexical meaning and literacy ability

The next findings show that the mastery of lexical meaning has a close relationship with the development of literacy skills of elementary school students. Lexicon or vocabulary becomes a basic element for reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. The wider the mastery of word meanings that students have, the greater their ability to understand various forms of text and express ideas clearly. Research by (Nurgiyantoro, 2020) revealed that the ability to understand lexical meanings is the main predictor in the ability to read and comprehend elementary school students.

In the context of Indonesian learning, semantic lexical teaching can be carried out through exploratory activities such as *semantic mapping*, meaning context analysis, and word association. The method has been shown to help learners build connections between words and understand the nuances of different meanings in various sentence contexts. As stated by (Leech, 1981), lexical meanings are the gateway to the formation of more complex contextual meanings. By strengthening their understanding of lexical meaning, learners can read texts with deeper understanding, write with more appropriate word choices, and actively participate in meaningful communication in their learning environment.

1.1.3 Semantic contribution to the development of vocabulary and effective sentence structure

Literature review also shows that semantics plays an important role in enriching vocabulary and forming effective sentence structures. Mastery of semantics helps students understand the relationship between meaning and linguistic forms, so that they are able to use words and sentences appropriately according to the context of communication. According to (Palmer, 1981), the ability to choose words and sentence structures that match their meaning is a characteristic of mature semantic competence.

Semantics-based learning not only expands vocabulary, but also trains learners to compose logical and coherent sentences. Research by (Manik, 2022) shows that the application of meaning analysis strategies in simple sentences helps elementary school students improve the accuracy of vocabulary use and improve their sentence structure. When learners understand semantic relationships such as hyponymy, meronymy, and antonymy, they can avoid the use of repetitive or out-of-context words. In addition, semantic understanding also helps learners understand syntactic functions in sentences,

such as the relationship between subjects, predicates, and objects, which results in effective and meaningful sentences.

Thus, it can be concluded that semantic teaching has a significant contribution to the development of complete language skills ranging from mastery of vocabulary, understanding the meaning of texts, to the ability to compose sentences effectively. The integration of semantics in Indonesian language learning in elementary schools is in line with the goal of the independent curriculum to develop students' critical, creative, and communicative thinking skills through meaningful language mastery.

2.1 Strategies in Semantic Learning

2.1.1 Effective semantic learning models

The results of the review of various literature show that there are several semantic learning models that have been proven effective in improving the understanding of meaning and literacy skills of elementary school students. The first widely used model is concept maps or *semantic mapping*. This strategy helps learners connect words, ideas, and concepts visually through a network of meanings. With semantic maps, students learn to recognize the relationships between words such as synonyms, antonyms, and conceptual associations, so that they are able to understand the structure of meaning in the text in more depth. Research (Wulandari, 2021) shows that the use of semantic maps in class V Indonesian learning can improve students' ability to understand the meaning of words and reading content.

The second model is contextual meaning analysis, which is an approach that emphasizes the ability of students to interpret the meaning of words based on the context of sentences or communication situations. Through contextual analysis, students not only memorize the definition of words, but also learn to adjust their meanings according to the usage situation. According to research (Azizah, 2022), the application of contextual meaning analysis exercises in Indonesian learning significantly improves comprehension literacy skills because students are used to thinking critically about implicit meanings.

In addition, *contextual word games* have also been found to be an effective strategy to develop semantic and literacy skills at the same time. Games such as "guess meanings", "connotated word chains", and "classification of meanings" not only increase interest in learning, but also train learners to recognize semantic relationships between words in a fun way. Research conducted by (Handayani, 2023) on elementary school students in Yogyakarta proves that contextual word play increases vocabulary retention and effective sentence writing skills. Thus, semantic learning models such as concept maps, meaning analysis, and contextual word games can be strategic innovations to strengthen literacy of meaning in Indonesian learning in elementary schools.

2.1.2 Relevance of previous research results to practice in primary schools

The results of studies on various previous studies show that there is a compatibility between the application of semantic learning and the need to strengthen literacy in elementary schools, especially in the context of the independent curriculum. The studies studied show that integrating semantic elements in Indonesian learning is able to improve students' reading, comprehension skills, and writing meanings. For example, a study by (Angelina T. Pires et al., 2025) found that semantics-based teaching helps students recognize connotative and denotative meanings in narrative texts, so they can interpret the content of the reading more precisely.

In learning practices in elementary schools, semantic strategies have also been proven to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students, especially in the aspects of critical, communicative, and creative thinking. Teachers can relate semantic activities to text-based project activities such as storybook creation, contextual poetry, or analysis of meaning in simple dialogue. The results of the study (Wati & Wahyuni, 2023) confirm that semantic teaching integrated with project-based learning is able to foster students' ability to construct meaning and communicate it logically.

The relationship between the results of previous research and learning practices in elementary schools also shows that the semantic approach is relevant to the spirit of the independent curriculum, which places language as a means of thinking and reasoning. Learning that focuses on understanding meaning makes students not just memorizers of words, but active thinkers who are able to interpret

texts according to their socio-cultural context. Thus, the integration of semantic learning models into Indonesian learning practices in elementary schools can be an effective strategy to improve literacy competencies while strengthening students' critical thinking character.

3.1 Semantic Linkage with the Independent Curriculum

3.1.1 Semantic integration in project- and text-based learning

The independent curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, with a *project-based and text-based approach*. In this context, semantics acts as a bridge between language mastery and critical thinking skills, because it focuses students on the meaning and context of language use. Semantic integration in literacy projects can be realized through activities such as creating mini-books, writing meaningful poems, or analyzing narrative texts by exploring lexical and contextual meanings.

The results of the literature review show that project-based learning that integrates semantic analysis is able to improve students' ability to understand the relationship of meaning between words and sentences. For example, research by (Wati and Wahyuni, 2023) found that learners involved in meaning-based literacy projects showed significant improvements in writing skills and understanding texts because they were directly involved in the process of constructing meaning. This approach is in line with the view (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022), that projects in the independent curriculum not only emphasize the final product, but also the thought process and meaning that occurs during learning.

In addition, semantic integration in text-based learning allows teachers to teach the structure of discourse in its entirety, from word meanings to inter-paragraph relationships. This is in line with research by (Azizah, 2022) which concluded that contextual meaning analysis helps students better understand the structure of narrative and descriptive texts. Thus, the integration of semantics in project-based learning and texts directly contributes to strengthening students' *higher order thinking skills* (HOTS), as well as fostering their ability to read and write meaningfully in accordance with the demands of the independent curriculum.

3.1.2 Literacy of meaning in Indonesian learning outcomes phase A–C

The independent curriculum divides Indonesian learning achievements into several phases, namely Phase A (grades I–II), Phase B (grades III–IV), and Phase C (grades V–VI). In each of these phases, the semantic aspect has an important position as a foundation in developing meaning literacy competencies. In Phase A, the main focus lies on the ability to understand and use simple vocabulary in the context of daily life. Teachers can introduce the meaning of words through pictures, short stories, or question-and-answer activities that reinforce the connection between form and meaning.

Entering Phase B, learning is directed to understand the meaning in simple sentences and texts. In this phase, activities such as "semantic maps of meaning" and "contextual meaning analysis" can help learners build the ability to infer meaning from narrative or informative texts. Meanwhile, in Phase C, students are expected to be able to interpret explicit and implied meanings in more complex texts, including explanatory and discussion texts. Semantic understanding in this phase supports the development of critical, argumentative, and expressive thinking skills which are the main goals of Indonesian learning in the independent curriculum.

Research conducted by (Nurgiyantoro, 2020) and (Manik, 2022) supports this, where both show that students who are guided to understand lexical and contextual meanings from an early age show more consistent literacy development in the later phases. Thus, semantics-based literacy of meaning not only strengthens language mastery, but also forms a logical, reflective, and communicative mindset in students in line with the Pancasila student profile mandated by the independent curriculum.

4.1 Comparison of Advantages and Disadvantages of Semantic Approach Compared to Conventional Methods.

4.1.1 Advantages of semantic approach in Indonesian learning

Based on the results of the literature review, the semantic approach has a number of significant advantages compared to conventional learning methods. This approach focuses on the meaning and

relationships between words in the context of discourse, not just on memorizing language structures. Thus, students do not just know the form of words or sentences, but understand the meaning behind them in depth. The semantic approach develops critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills, as learners are trained to interpret both explicit and implicit meanings in the text.

Research conducted by (Nisak, Basyar, and Arisyanto, 2020) shows that learning based on meaning analysis increases reading comprehension by up to 30% compared to the direct reading method without semantic analysis. Meanwhile, (Wulandari, 2021) found that the use of semantic maps in learning expands vocabulary and significantly improves the ability to infer meaning of elementary school students. In addition, the semantic approach supports the creation of an active and interactive learning environment as learners engage in the exploration of meaning through text-based discussions and activities. This is very much in line with the principles of the independent curriculum, which emphasizes meaning-based, collaborative, and contextual learning.

Based on the results of various studies, it can be seen that the semantic approach has conceptual and practical advantages compared to conventional methods that are still widely used in Indonesian language learning. A comparison of the characteristics of the two can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Comparison of Characteristics of Semantic Approaches and Conventional Methods

Learning Aspects	Semantic Approach	Conventional Methods
Learning Focus	Meaning and context of language	Tata bahasa dan hafalan
The Role of the Teacher	Facilitator of meaning	Primary sources of knowledge
Student Activities	Meaning analysis, semantic maps, discussion	Structural exercises, literal reading
Student Involvement	Active and reflective	Passive and receptive
Learning Outcomes	Deep understanding of meaning and context	Surface and mechanistic understanding

Source (Vitriani, Azizah, Munir, 2025)

The table above shows that the semantic approach emphasizes more on the construction of meaning and the active participation of students in understanding language. In contrast, conventional methods tend to emphasize structural aspects without fostering an awareness of meaning. Therefore, the semantic approach is considered more relevant to the principle of meaningful learning in the independent curriculum.

Pedagogically, the advantage of the semantic approach also lies in its flexibility. Teachers can integrate meaning analysis in various types of narrative, descriptive, and explanatory texts and combine them with other strategies such as *project-based learning* or *contextual teaching and learning*. Thus, Indonesian learning becomes more meaningful, relevant, and encourages continuous literacy mastery.

4.1.2 Disadvantages and challenges of semantic approaches compared to conventional methods

Although it has many advantages, the semantic approach also has its challenges and limitations in its implementation. One of the main obstacles is the readiness of teachers. Most elementary school teachers do not yet have a deep understanding of semantic theory and how to integrate it in language learning. This condition causes the application of semantics to often be conceptual only without a concrete strategy.

In addition, semantic approaches require a longer learning time than conventional methods. Activities such as semantic maps, contextual meaning analysis, and meaning discussions require longer exploration time for learners to truly understand the concepts being taught. On the other hand, conventional methods that emphasize lectures and grammar exercises are implemented more quickly, although they tend to result in superficial learning.

Another limitation lies in the ability of students to think abstractly, especially in the early phase of primary education. Lower-class students tend to understand concrete meanings more easily than contextual or metaphorical meanings that often appear in semantic studies. Therefore, teachers need to adjust the semantic approach to the level of cognitive development of students so that learning remains effective. However, most studies confirm that with the right guidance, semantic learning is still able to improve meaning literacy skills better than conventional methods, especially in the long term.

Taking into account its advantages and disadvantages, the semantic approach can be seen as an innovative learning strategy that demands the pedagogical readiness of teachers and the adjustment of the learning context. The combination of semantic approaches and conventional, flexibly tailored methods will result in a more balanced learning process emphasizing meaning without neglecting language structure and time efficiency.

5.1 The Role of Teachers, Curriculum, and Media in Semantic Reinforcement

The results of the literature review show that the strengthening of the semantic abilities of elementary school students cannot be separated from three main components: teachers, curriculum, and learning media. The three play a synergistic role in creating a meaningful, contextual, and meaning-oriented Indonesian learning process.

5.1.1 The role of teachers as facilitators of meaning

Teachers have a key role in integrating semantic aspects into Indonesian learning activities. In the independent curriculum, teachers no longer play the role of the only source of knowledge, but as facilitators who guide students to find meaning through language exploration. Research by (Wulandari, 2021) emphasizes that teachers who apply semantic strategies such as meaning maps and contextual discussions can improve students' critical thinking skills in interpreting texts. Teachers also need to guide students to associate words with real experiences so that the meaning of language becomes more concrete and relevant to daily life.

In addition, teachers' pedagogical ability to understand semantic theory also affects the success of learning. According to research (Azizah, 2022), many elementary school teachers still focus on the mechanistic aspects of language (such as grammar and spelling) without directing students to understand meaning. Therefore, improving teacher competence in the field of applied linguistics and training in the development of meaning-based teaching materials is an important need in the implementation of the independent curriculum.

5.1.2 The role of the curriculum as a framework for semantic reinforcement

The independent curriculum provides a more flexible space for teachers to develop meaning- and context-based learning. The Indonesian Learning Outcomes (CP) from Phase A to C place the understanding of the meaning of the text and vocabulary development as the main focus of literacy. This shows that semantics is not just an add-on, but a core part of language competence. The independent curriculum also emphasizes *text-based learning* and *project-based learning* approaches that can be integrated with meaning analysis, word exploration, and multimodal text interpretation.

The advantage of the independent curriculum is its emphasis on the autonomy of teachers in adapting learning to the characteristics of students. Teachers can choose themes, texts, and learning media that allow for deeper exploration of meaning. However, in order for the semantic approach to be carried out optimally, the curriculum needs to be equipped with implementable guidelines and examples of contextual semantic activities for various learning phases.

5.1.3 The role of learning media in building awareness of meaning

Learning media has a strategic function in helping students understand the meaning of language visually, auditory, and kinesthetic. The use of interactive media such as digital semantic maps, contextual vocabulary cards, and text-based videos can strengthen students' understanding of the relationship between meanings between words. According to research (Handayani, 2023), the application of *contextual word games* and visual-based media has been proven to increase learning engagement and expand the semantic understanding of elementary school students. Digital media is

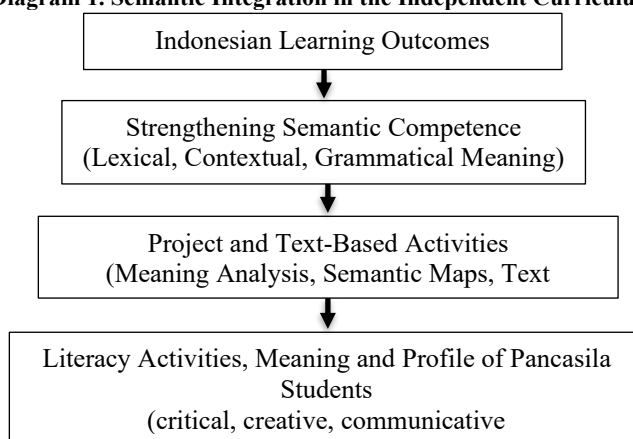
also in line with the principles of the independent curriculum that encourages innovative and adaptive learning to technological developments.

However, the effectiveness of the media is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to choose and use it according to the learning objectives. Media should not only be a visual aid, but should be a means of exploring meaning. Therefore, the integration between media design, semantic goals, and pedagogical strategies should be a major concern in Indonesian language learning.

Thus, it can be concluded that strengthening semantics in Indonesian learning in elementary schools requires synergy between teacher competence, curriculum flexibility, and learning media innovation. These three aspects complement each other in forming a learning environment that encourages understanding of meaning, critical thinking, and contextual literacy in accordance with the direction of curriculum policies.

The integration of semantics in the independent curriculum can be explained through the relationship between learning objectives, learning activities and the achievement of the Pancasila student profile. The integration of semantics in the independent curriculum can be explained through the following flows:

Diagram 1. Semantic Integration in the Independent Curriculum



Source (Vitriani, Azizah, Munir, 2025)

The diagram shows that semantics is the link between Indonesian learning outcomes, project-based learning activities, and the formation of Pancasila student profiles. Through mastery of lexical, contextual, and grammatical meanings, learners build critical, creative, and communicative thinking skills, which are at the core of 21st century skills. Thus, semantics-based learning is in line with the orientation of the independent curriculum which emphasizes meaningful and student-centered learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review and the discussions that have been conducted, it can be concluded that the concept of semantics has a significant role in the development of Indonesian literacy competencies of elementary school students. Understanding lexical, grammatical, and contextual meaning is an important foundation in language skills that include reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Semantic teaching has been proven to be able to improve students' ability to understand the meaning of texts, expand vocabulary, and foster critical thinking skills in interpreting various forms of discourse.

The application of semantic learning has also been proven to be in line with the spirit of the independent curriculum, which emphasizes learning based on meaning, context, and real experiences. Semantic integration in project-based and text-based learning helps learners construct meaning independently, actively, and reflectively. Thus, semantics is not only a theoretical linguistic

domain, but also a practical strategy in building meaningful literacy competencies that are oriented towards the formation of Pancasila student profiles.

Suggestion

1. For teachers, it is recommended to integrate an explicit semantic approach in Indonesian learning, both through meaning map activities, contextual meaning analysis, and word games that foster awareness of meaning and enrich students' vocabulary.
2. For educational institutions, it is necessary to develop semantics-based learning and training modules that are tailored to the characteristics of elementary school students so that teachers have implementable guidance in teaching meaning in a contextual and interesting manner.
3. For the next researcher, it is recommended to conduct empirical research to test the effectiveness of the application of the semantic learning model in improving reading and writing literacy in the real classroom, so that the results of theoretical findings can be strengthened with practical data in the field.

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