



The making of proficient young EFL learners in a bilingual speaking class: challenges and strategies

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' strategies to teach students' speaking skills are very essential to overcome students' obstacles in learning to speak. The present study aims to explore the challenges faced by EFL teachers and their strategies in boosting speaking skills to young learners at the elementary level which enacts a bilingual class program. Three primary EFL school teachers volunteered to participate in this study. Framed in a case study approach, data were garnered through observation and semi-structured interviews. The data from these two collection methods were analyzed qualitatively. The study findings have revealed several challenges faced by teachers in teaching speaking to young EFL learners such as lack of vocabulary, missing pronunciation, problems with students' self-confidence, and speaking in line. In response to these, several strategies were applied by the teachers in teaching speaking to young learners, including discussion, games, picture description, and role-play. This study concludes with some pedagogical implications on how EFL teachers reflect on the enactment of interactive learning strategies that should adapt to the material, conditions, and students' abilities so that the strategies can be adapted to foster proficient young EFL learners.

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Introduction

English is a foreign language in Indonesia, but it occupies an important position in our society. English is taught in schools because most of the science and technology in any field are written in English. Thus, mastery of a foreign language will be the way for Indonesians to interact in a global society (Santoso, 2014). Based on the educational curriculum at that time, English began to be taught at the junior high school level in 1946 and at the senior high school level in 1950. The Indonesian government then began to introduce English as much as possible for students in elementary schools via primary education stipulated in the 1994

Curriculum. Since the implementation of the curriculum subjects, English has been taught as a local content lesson beginning in grade four elementary school (Maduwu, 2016).

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four skills required for teaching and studying English (Ali, 2022). Speaking is one of the forms of communicative ability. However, sometimes, students can only understand the meaning that the interlocutor conveys without being able to reply because of a lack of English vocabulary, speaking ability, and lack of self-confidence from students so they are often embarrassed or afraid to speak. Other issues that are frequently observed in the language classroom are related to individual learners' personalities and attitudes toward the learning process, particularly learning speaking such as low participation, keeping use of their mother language, having nothing to say because of fear of making mistakes (Aleksandrak, 2011).

Therefore, teachers should be able to encourage their students to have a learning spirit and evolve with the times to create innovative and high-quality learning (Timperley et al., 2014), and also want to follow and complete learning according to the lesson plan that has been determined. There are various things that teachers need to pay attention to increase student learning motivation, as well as in choosing learning strategies to create a pleasant learning atmosphere (Emda, 2017).

Moreover, learning English speaking at the elementary level often encounters many problems. Teachers entail extra hard work to teach English to young learners in elementary school because of its position as a foreign language and local content in Indonesia. Other reasons that underlie this are students' learning motivation is low because they think English is hard to learn. Second, as local content, English has very limited contact hours, so students have less learning frequency. Third, learning English for young learners does not have a complete system, so learning is carried out in a perfunctory manner (Musthafa, 2010).

The main problem in teaching English speaking skills is the fact that English has a very restricted function used in social interactions in Indonesia, especially in a small town like Pekalongan. Even so, one of the elementary schools in Pekalongan City enacts a bilingual class program in which the implementation of learning uses two languages, namely Indonesian and English. A bilingual class program is a strategy for teaching students how to use a foreign language. Implementing bilingual classroom programs provides various advantages for children, including becoming fluent in both languages and becoming experts in literacy and other scientific subjects (Agustian & Sujarwati, 2023). In supporting the bilingual program, the school organizes extracurriculars focused on learning to speak, one of which is Let's Talk. The Let's Talk is intended for all students from grades 1 to 6 and is divided into three levels, i.e., beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Based on that reason, the research explores the challenges faced by teachers during the teaching-learning process and the strategies used by the teachers in these schools in teaching speaking to young learners so that students want to use bilingual programs during learning at school even though they may not use English in their daily conversations.

However, there are some situations creating problems in conducting teaching and learning language in bilingual class. Those problems are influenced by input of the class and students' condition. Several researchers have discussed issues on teacher strategies in teaching speaking skills. Studies by Pratama and Awaliyah (2016), Robert and Pane (2020), Samae (2020), and Septiana and Rahayuningsih (2022) reported there are numerous

strategies used by teachers to teach English speaking skills to young learners. However, the research studies focus on teaching English to young learners aged 13-14 and students at junior high school level did not focus on bilingual classes. To fill this void, the researcher feels compelled to conduct this study, which aims to provide insights on challenges encountered during the speaking learning process and teachers' strategies for teaching speaking skills to elementary schools that implement bilingual class programs. The study findings could help EFL teachers improve practical strategies for teaching English-speaking skills in elementary schools, both for bilingual and regular classes. It can also be utilized as additional details for other researchers who conduct further studies in the related field.

Method

The qualitative method was used in this study. The case study looked into classroom phenomena, specifically teachers' challenges and strategies in teaching a speaking class. This research was conducted in an elementary school in Pekalongan. This school is used as research setting because the school has a bilingual class program and extracurricular speaking class. Then, the present study involved three EFL teachers from three classes. They were beginner level, intermediate level, and advanced levels. The purpose of recruiting the participants is to investigate the challenges faced by teachers in teaching and the strategies used by teachers at each grade level. Data were collected through interviews and classroom observation. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian language to avoid misinterpretation. The result of the interview was later transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. To find the main themes and analyze more detail about the data, the researcher employed thematic analysis and Kayi's theory about strategies to teach speaking to young learners. According to Barkhuizen et al. (2014), there are five steps in the thematic analysis, including reading data repeatedly, coding and categorizing data, reorganizing data, discussing and dividing as well as illustrating them.

Findings and discussion

Challenges in teaching speaking to young learners in a bilingual EFL class

It is not easy to teach English, and teachers confront various difficulties in the process of learning English, particularly when teaching oral English to young learners. Teachers have a range of obstacles when teaching speaking in schools or courses, which might impede the learning process (Putri & Nurjati, 2023). The researcher identified four challenges which are analyzed by Pratama and Awaliyah (2016) that were faced by the teachers in teaching speaking to young learners. Those challenges are lack of vocabularies, missing pronunciation, reluctant students, and keep using their L1. Not all the challenges were faced by teachers in teaching at the Let's Talk program. The researcher has identified the challenges faced by teachers in teaching speaking for young learners and the most common challenges such as lack of vocabularies and missing pronunciation. There are five challenges found in practicing speaking, but the first one is the most common issue found by the researcher.

The first challenge faced by the teachers is a lack of vocabulary. Students from beginner to advanced levels have the same challenge in learning to speak, which is related to vocabulary mastery. As Jhon said, "Some of them, when they hear people speaking English, they little understand, but they can't answer in English because they don't have enough

vocabulary". In addition to Jhon, Airin also said, "Sometimes some students don't know the vocab, don't understand what English is." Regarding vocabulary, Rose gave her comment, "Then they sometimes have less vocabulary. Indeed, they are not used to memorizing, they just keep practicing like that."

From the results above, the researcher found that students from beginner to advanced levels have the same problem in learning to speak, which is related to vocabulary mastery. The teachers found that a lack of vocabulary can affect students' academics and interaction. This is because sometimes students do not understand what the teacher conveys, so the teacher must explain again using Indonesian. Thus, students can understand the explanation and material conveyed by the teacher. This lack of vocabulary also has an impact on student interaction because sometimes students only understand the teacher's explanation without being able to answer them in English because they do not master English vocabulary. In this case, students lack vocabularies because they rarely memorize vocabularies.

This condition is in line with Pratama and Awaliyah's (2016) argument, that students must learn vocabulary and structure to communicate in English. Dewi and Jimmi (2018) mentioned that students who lack vocabulary will have an effect on themselves when interacting and will be less confident. Students who have a large vocabulary can better understand the dialogue, respond faster in a chat, and possibly talk effectively on certain topics. Without a proper vocabulary, one cannot successfully communicate or express his views in both spoken and written form (Cameron, 2001).

The second challenge is about students' self-confidence. Speaking abilities accompanied by self-confidence are extremely powerful in this matter so that the opinions stated may be understood and able to affect the individuals who hear them (Anam, 2020). However, there are still several students who lack confidence while speaking. As Jhon said, "They are afraid to answer in English because they are afraid of making mistakes". As well as John, Airin also said, "Some children like to say "What exactly is English? I don't speak it.". Rose also gave comment related to students' self-confidence and said, "For students' self-confidence, there are still only 1 or 2 at most. It is because the students are an introvert."

Based on the results of the interviews, it can be known that there are still some students who have problems related to self-confidence, both at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. However, this challenge to students' self-confidence is based on different factors. According to John and Airin's explanation, students at the beginner and intermediate levels have problems with self-confidence because they are still confused about what will be conveyed and are afraid of making mistakes.

Ratnasari (2020) explained that students are lack of confidence because they think their English is poor, so they remain silent. According to Souisa and Gaité (2020), a lack of confidence can be induced by feelings of being judged by others, difficulties in compiling messages to be delivered, and fear of making mistakes. Likewise, this is caused by the lack of vocabulary which is still a challenge for students. It is in line with Sudrajat and Apriliani's (2022) explanation, that a lack of vocabulary makes children less confident when speaking. Pratama and Awaliyah (2016) explained students are frequently reluctant to participate in classroom activities. Because they are occasionally nervous, lack self-confidence, and are afraid of making mistakes. Meanwhile, from the Rose explanation for students at the

advanced level, this self-confidence problem arises as a result of the personality of the student who is indeed introverted even though these students are already fluent in English.

The third challenge is that students' pronunciation is unclear. Problems related to pronunciation were still found at the beginner and intermediate levels. John believed, "Sometimes they mispronounce, for example, they want to say "run." They mispronounce the word because the way the letters are pronounced in English is different from the way they are pronounced in Indonesian." Airin said "Their level of English is different, and the grammar structure when they speak is not very structural, so there are one or two who say it incorrectly. Moreover, English can be said to be a foreign language."

According to John's explanation, this missing pronunciation happened because the students pronounce letters in English different from the way to pronounce them in Indonesian so the students have difficulty in pronouncing words. In line with John's explanation, Airin added the fact that English is a foreign language in Indonesia is another factor that caused students to have challenges in English pronunciation. It is also in accordance with Pratama and Awaliyah (2016), stating that students sometimes mispronunciation because English is a foreign language, they have difficulties if they have to follow their native English because the way of pronouncing English is different from their mother language.

Students have difficulty in articulating and pronouncing some phonemes or words when learning English. Therefore, the students are afraid of how to pronounce a phoneme or word, then they only say it as well as they know. Meanwhile, according to the explanation from the teacher at the advanced level, in terms of pronunciation, students at the advanced level have mastered it well. The next issue for teachers, according to Copland et al. (2014), was encouraging students to speak English and ensuring that they did it accurately, correctly, and precisely. Teachers faced similar challenges while teaching young learners how to communicate. Young learners struggle to pronounce words correctly, do not use whole phrases, and speak in subdued tones.

The next challenge faced by the teachers in teaching speaking was grammar. Problems related to grammar were still found at the beginner and intermediate levels. John said, "The grammar arrangement when they say it isn't structural yet, so there are say it isn't right." Moreover, Airin also said, "As for the challenges that I face in this speaking they don't have proper grammar. But so far, they dare to try it's been good in my opinion."

Grammar is one of the language systems that must be taught to language learners, hence teaching grammar to young learners is difficult. When speaking, grammar is not always necessary, but it is fundamental to convey and describe correctly (Ibrahim, 2016). Some people may argue that grammar is unimportant, but they are mistaken. Of course, it is possible to speak without obeying any grammar rules and merely using vocabulary. However, studying grammar is critical for progressing to higher levels of the language. On the other side, students may find the term grammar terrifying. Based on the interview results, problems related to grammar were still found at the beginner and intermediate levels. In interviews with John and Airin, they explained that their main focus was getting their students to speak English. Therefore, grammar is not explained clearly, it is just that the teacher still gives examples of the use of correct grammar, so it can be said that students learn by doing. As explained by Airin, "Because we focus on speaking and the time for the

Let's Talk program is only an hour, so we only correct the pupil's wrong grammar. For example, if a child says "there is two cars" then I will correct "there are two cars." Meanwhile, based on the explanation from Rose, students in the advanced level already speak with grammar, "Their grammar is okay, there are at least one or two that are not appropriate sometimes but it's normal for elementary school students." Moreover, learning grammar requires memorizing and habituating the patterns. Those condition creates boredom and pessimistic for the students with low level of understanding.

The last challenge faced by the teacher is the challenge of speaking in line. This challenge is faced by Rose, the teacher at advanced level. She said, "The biggest challenge is that they always have to be directed to speak in line so that the topic doesn't go off-topic. This speak in line because they have high imagination, it caused they cannot speak in line." Related to the interviews data, Rose explained that the teacher (Rose) should continue to remind students to keep speaking in line with the topic. Frequently, what is discussed by students is out of topic. This is because their imagination is so high and students' mastery of English at this advanced level is already good and they are fluent in speaking English so that they easily discuss a topic and even get out of the topic of discussion.

Strategies in teaching speaking to young learners in a bilingual EFL class

Every challenge or problem necessitates a solution. A solution is a method of resolving a problem. In this section, the researcher will discuss solutions to the challenges that teachers confront when teaching speaking to young learners. Teachers' strategies to teach students speaking skills are very important to overcome students' challenges in learning to speak (Razi et al., 2021). English teachers are expected to give efficient ways for teaching speaking so that students can reach their aim of becoming proficient English speakers. Furthermore, in this digital age, teachers are expected to be very imaginative and creative (Motteram, 2013). Kayi (2006) explains that thirteen strategies can be used for learning to speak, namely discussion, role play, simulation, information gap, brainstorming, storytelling, interview, story completion, reporting, playing cards, picture narrating, picture describing, and finding the difference. Based on the results of the interview, the researcher has identified the strategies that teachers applied in teaching speaking to young learners through discussions, games, role-play, describing pictures, drilling, and conversation.

The first strategy that teachers applied in teaching speaking to young learners is discussions. This discussion activity is carried out by forming groups, or class discussions or it can be done in pairs as is carried out in the advance class. As John said, "For the strategy, we are more into a discussion. Thus, the teacher acts as a friend, the teacher doesn't just teach in front of the class". Rose also said, "For the discussion, if the topic is more out of topic, for example at the airport, at the movie. I told them to discuss it with me or the pairs like that. I just put it like that."

As seen from the John's explanation as teacher at beginner level, the teacher chose this discussion strategy to bring the relationship between the teacher and students closer. In these discussions, John position themselves as "friends" so that learning is more enjoyable, students are more comfortable with teachers and teachers are not monotonous just teaching material in front of the class. Meanwhile, based on Rose's explanation as a teacher at the advanced level, it can be seen that the teacher uses this discussion strategy to discuss broad

topics. Through this strategy, the teacher can find out students' views about something, e.g., airport, movie, etc.

This discussion activity can be used by the teacher to train students' confidence in expressing their opinions, increase vocabulary, and hone their speaking skills through conversation habits. This confirms Kayi's (2006) statement, in the discussion activity students can share their ideas about an event, find some solutions, and then conclude with their group. The teacher must set the purpose of the discussion as a guide for students. The activity encourages critical thinking and speedy decision-making, and students learn how to explain and justify themselves politely even when they disagree with others. Furthermore, one method for learning to speak a foreign language is through group discussions. It assists pupils in improving their public speaking skills. Students in a group will have the opportunity to utilize English among themselves and practice with their peers. Speaking with their peers or in a group will help them enhance their vocabulary mastery, understanding, fluency, and grammar. Furthermore, learning in a group will boost the students' confidence and leadership skills (Bohari, 2019).

The second strategy that is applied by teachers in teaching speaking to young learners is through games. John claimed, "As for other strategies, it is usually games. To engage the children so that they focus on the lesson first. We usually use Quiziz or Wordwall. Depending on the situation, the teachers may adjust the material as well. If the students, for example, are asked to describe things in the class, the games can be offline. Because the objects are few and close." Airin also said, "The strategy that I used is games. There are various forms, there are Chinese whisper games, games that we provide through online applications such as Bamboozle, Quizziz, Wordwall, etc."

The term "young learners" refers to children between the ages of 5 and 12. It is possible that games are a natural element of the life of young learners. Games also create a fantastic atmosphere in children's language classes. English language games have been shown to increase learning and to be one of the most effective classroom tools. The first reason games are so beneficial is because they make learning interesting, so children are willing participants rather than simply being present in class because they have to be. Students pay more attention because when they have fun, they perform better, feel better about themselves, and perform even better - it is a learning loop that works in their favor (Ibrahim, 2016).

Games typically incorporate friendly competition and keep students interested in. These provide motivation for EFL students to become motivated and actively participate in the learning process (Kurniawati, 2013). There are various games that teachers use in teaching speaking, both offline and online games. This strategy game is implemented by John at the beginner and Airin at the intermediate level. This is because students at these two levels can be said to be just learning English and not too good at speaking, so the teacher uses games to make learning more fun and easier for students to follow. As seen in the results of John's interviews, John as a teacher at beginner level used games to engage students to focus on learning. The games used depend on the situation and material. If the material tends to be easy and the required properties are available around the class, then the games selected are offline games. However, if the property is not around them, John chooses to take advantage of online games in the form of quizzes, namely Quiziz and Wordwall. Meanwhile, the games used by Rose as teachers at the intermediate level are more diverse, there are Chinese whisper games, games that we provide through online applications such as Bamboozle,

Quizziz, Wordwall, etc. In fact, the children in the class are super hyperactive so it is a challenge for the teacher himself to use the method and come up with new ideas every lesson so that they do not get bored using the same method.

According to Hadi (2015), games are especially beneficial for a child who is just starting to learn a foreign language. Children need time to acclimatize to the language and exposure to input before they experiment with producing language. As a result, games provide an important tool for children to listen to and grasp language without having to produce it. The use of games in teaching speaking also creates groups for young learners to practice working with others. The benefits of playing games include developing cooperation and team spirit, involving competition, encouraging everyone to take turns, and connecting to a variety of intelligences. Therefore, using games can improve young learners' motivation in learning.

The third strategy is describing picture. This strategy is applied at intermediate and advance levels. Airin said, "For example, if they see the picture, then they can describe the picture. Later, the student that can describe many things about the pictures will be won." Rose added, "As for the picture describing, yesterday I worked on the amusement park chapter, so it seems like there was a culprit, tickets, later I will order them to describe what they watch, and what they see."

The system of this picture describing in both levels is almost the same, the teacher shows a picture and then asks them to describe many things about the picture, for example, what they see or what they can do. From this activity, the teacher can see how students view a picture and how their knowledge and imagination describe a picture. According to Kayi's (2006) theory, this practice encourages participants' creativity and imagination, as well as their public speaking skills.

Raimes and Arshad in Maulidar et al. (2019) explained, there are four reasons why using pictures in the classroom is beneficial. For starters, pictures give a common experience for students in a classroom. Second, they present typical grammatical features that students can use and practice in class. Third, pictures may cause speaking task changes. Fourth, they are also intriguing to students. Furthermore, by using visuals, students can focus on the picture to acquire the idea, and it motivates students to use their abilities. According to Harmer (2015), when pupils speak or describe the pictures, they may readily construct the story. In conclusion, using describing pictures strategy can assist students in enhancing their speaking skills. It also encourages pupils to participate in the learning process. Furthermore, Kurniawati (2013) explains that this method can encourage students to pay attention and participate in learning process, describe an object, and supply and stimulate information during a dialogue or discussion.

The next strategy is role-play. Role play is a speaking activity in which students dress up as other individuals and engage with them based on their characteristics (Kurniawati, 2013). This strategy is applied by Rose, the teacher at an advanced level. Rose said, "In advance, it's more role-play. For the system, for example, role-playing at the mall, I gave them the vocabularies first, and then I'll ask them to one to be a seller and one to be a buyer. They later will imagine that they are at the mall, and they will act."

Students are given themes, vocabularies, and also their roles. This is system the same as Kayi's (2006) view, in role-play activities, teachers give information to students about various

social contexts and students pretend to have a variety of social rules. Then the teacher asks students to role-play according to the teacher's instructions to boost their confidence.

The role-playing strategy increased students' motivation to learn. The use of role-play generated a more student-centered learning environment (Kumaran, 2017). Role-play is used as a teacher's strategy so that students practice speaking in English because students' English skills at the advanced level are already good so they only need a lot of practice to hone their speaking skills. Moreover, as Rose explained before students at advance levels have high imagination, so this strategy fits them. This method also promotes the children's language creativity. They can play the roles they want and put themselves in situations that attract them. They might also contribute their mood and attitude to the discussion. In other words, role play is an example of learning by doing in which students were actively involved in activities in which they could imagine themselves in a certain situation outside of the classroom and sometimes playing the role of someone and utilizing the language depending on the environment (Jannah et al., 2020).

The last strategy is drilling. This strategy was applied by Airin as a teacher at the intermediate level. Airin said, "I am more used drilling in teaching, so when I can't be intense with students one by one in the regular class, for example to pronouncing a word, I can do that in Let's Talk activities because it's more conducive." According to Houston in Maulidar et al. (2019), drilling is a technique for standardizing a language item's pronunciation and improving fluidity (the capacity to introduce material quickly and readily). Airin explained that the Let's Talk program is more intensive than regular lessons so that Airin can focus more on teaching the children one by one. For example, in teaching them how to pronounce a word, Airin also explained that this strategy can help teachers know the abilities of each student.

Drilling could help pupils improve their English vocabulary mastery. It can also improve students' vocabulary, allowing them to understand English better, and it can boost students' motivation to learn English. Drill activities can be quite beneficial to students. Most importantly, making this space and spending time in the classroom to drilling creates a secure atmosphere for students to experiment with generating the language, focusing on pronunciation and hearing or saying certain words and phrases. Students can listen and then repeat words with challenging sounds, or they can help students replicate intonation that is different from their language. It also emphasizes precision, including intricacy and fluidity, which is beneficial (Fransiska & Jurianto, 2016). In line to Kurniawati's (2013) explanation, repetition drills can improve pupils' capacity to produce language more efficiently while also making comprehension easier.

Based on the data above, it can be stated that there are at least five strategies that teachers applied in teaching speaking to young learners, namely discussions, games, describing pictures, role-play, and drilling. The use of the strategies is to fix the challenges that are faced by the teachers and help teachers hone students' speaking skills. As explained above, the teacher chose this discussion strategy to bring the relationship between the teacher and students closer so that learning is more enjoyable, students are more comfortable with teachers. This discussion activity can be used by the teacher to train students' confidence in expressing their opinions, increase vocabulary and also hone their speaking skills through conversation habits. Then, the teacher uses games to make learning more fun and easier for students to follow. The benefits of playing games include developing

cooperation and team spirit, involving competition, encouraging everyone to take turns, and connecting to a variety of intelligence. Similarly, practicing describing pictures encourages participants' creativity and imagination, as well as their public speaking skills.

Furthermore, role-playing is a great way to boost their confidence. The role-play method engaged students' motivation in the learning process. Last one, drilling can help students replicate intonation that is different from their own language. It also emphasizes precision, including intricacy and fluidity. Therefore, we can see that teachers' strategies to teach students speaking skills are very important to overcome students' challenges in learning to speak (Razi et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This research is capable of providing empirical data about teachers' challenges and teaching strategies in teaching speaking to young learners. After the researcher analyzed the observation and interview data, it can be concluded that there are five challenges faced by teachers in teaching speaking skills to young learners, namely lack of vocabulary, self-confidence, missing pronunciation, grammar, and speaking in line. The challenges emerged and faced by teachers at each level are different. Teachers at the beginner and intermediate levels face challenges that are still the same as lack of vocabulary, self-confidence, missing pronunciation, and grammar.

The researcher also found that the strategies that teachers applied at each level are different. At the beginner level, the teacher applies discussion and games both offline and online (Quiziz and Wordwall) to teach speaking strategies. Then, the teacher at the intermediate level applied games such as Chinese whisper, describing the picture, Quiziz, Wordwall, Bamboozle, and also drilling to teaching speaking strategies. While teachers at advance level applied discussion, role-play, and describing pictures as teaching speaking strategies. The strategies used are adapted to the material, conditions, and also students' abilities so that they can be followed by students properly.

Based on the results, the present study also gives some recommendations to English teachers especially those who teach speaking skills, particularly in a bilingual class. Therefore, in teaching speaking the teacher should use strategies that are adapted to the conditions and also the students' abilities. Teachers also have to pay more attention to students, so that teachers can find out the challenges that exist in learning speaking skills as well as find the solution or strategies that can solve learning problems faced by students and the teachers.

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