

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON JAPANESE AND INDONESIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

Pendidikan dasar secara umum terbagi dalam dua lembaga pendidikan yakni sekolah dasar dan sekolah menengah pertama. Proses pendidikan yang berlangsung di sekolah dasar merupakan landasan yang sangat penting untuk proses pendidikan di lembaga selanjutnya. Tujuan yang sangat penting dari proses pendidikan di sekolah dasar adalah pengembangan otot, emosi, sosialisasi, pengenalan lingkungan, dan aspek kebahasaan. Kemudian, mulai kelas empat di sekolah dasar, para siswa mendalami ilmu pengetahuan secara intensif. Sekolah dasar di Jepang menekankan pada pendidikan mental sehingga anak bisa lebih ulet, tabah, toleran, dan optimis dalam hidup bermasyarakat. Pendidikan moral, olah raga, ketrampilan, dan pendidikan kesejahteraan keluarga sangat penting dalam pengembangan kepribadian siswa. Pelajaran matematika dan ilmu pengetahuan banyak diajarkan dengan pendekatan kontekstual di sekolah dasar di Indonesia dan Jepang. Kedua Negara juga mulai memberikan pelajaran Bahasa Inggris kepada siswa sekolah dasar untuk mengenalkan secara dini bahasa dan kebudayaan bangsa lain serta mempersiapkan mereka dalam persaingan global. Melakukan studi banding terhadap kondisi pendidikan Negara lain membuat kita memperoleh informasi yang benar terhadap pencapaian kita dan Negara lain di bidang pendidikan serta membuat langkah-langkah perbaikan berdasarkan data yang terpercaya bukan kabar burung yang tidak jelas.

Keyword: Elementary school education, learning activity, English learning activity

A. Background of Study

Indonesian Ministry of Education states that education activity in elementary school plays an important role as a basis to develop the children to achieve their full potential in order to give positive contribution for their future life and society. Elementary school is the first gate for the children to know themselves and the world around them, it facilitates the students to acquire basic life skill and nurture the mind of students for the basic element of science and technology. Elementary school means an education institution which manages 6 year education program including elementary school for the student with the specific need. The main objective of Indonesian elementary school education is to teach the students

basic knowledge, moral, basic life skills, good personality for the meaningful future life and to prepare the students for the continuing study in high school level.

Lodge states that life is education and education is life (Muhaimin et al, 2001). It means that education is an integral part of human life and has to contribute to the improvement of living standard of society such as advancing technology, promoting mutual cooperation among nations and others. Education is the basic right for the Japanese people as is stated in Japan Constitution enacted in 1946 that all people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided by law (Article 26). The Fundamental Law of Education of Japan enacted in 1947 decides the goal of education as follows: education shall aim at full development of personality, at rearing a people, sound in mind and body who love truth and justice, esteem individual values, respect labor, have a deep sense of responsibility, and are imbued with an independent spirit as the builders of a peaceful state and society. The objectives of education stated above are translated into some specific points as the objectives of Japanese education in twenty first century, they are:

1. The development of broad mindedness, a healthy body, and creativity in individuals;
2. The rearing of the spirit of freedom, self reliance, and public awareness;
3. Educating the Japanese individual for the global human society.

Both Japan and Indonesia value highly the important and significant role of elementary school to prepare young generation for the bright future of nation and tightly global competition. The two countries think of the children's position as the invaluable asset and have to do the best to provide modern and sophisticated educational facility, design up to date curriculum, to hire the best teaching staff to reach highly satisfied academic achievement. Children are the seed and we have to treat and nurture properly for the best crop in the future.

Japan and Indonesia are culturally almost similar; they appreciate harmonious life, keep social cooperation among society members, and highly praise Asian culture. As is said by Junichiro Koizumi, a former Japanese prime minister, that all Asian countries especially Indonesia and Japan should act together and advance together (*berjalan bersama dan maju bersama*). The two countries continuously improve their educational level to catch up with that of the developed countries especially western countries. To do a comparative study on elementary school education of both two countries means to get lesson from educational problems exist in Indonesian and Japanese elementary school. It is by no means to judge which is better in educational achievement between Indonesian elementary

school and Japanese elementary school. It is merely intended to arouse our awareness about our position in internationally academic achievement and we take some steps to tackle educational problem from the reliable data not from anecdotal issues.

B. Learning Activity in Indonesian and Japanese Elementary School

Japan determines the target of the early years of elementary school to prepare young generation to socialize with somebody else, develop language skill, to grow mental and physical aspect, to know how to preserve the environment for the sake of current and future life. Then, Japan starts nurturing the mind of children from grade 4 of elementary school. It is to develop Japanese children to achieve their full capacity by mastering science and technology. The goals of Japanese elementary school are as follows:

- a. To help the children acquire basic knowledge, skills, and mind to have healthy social life as an individual as well as a member of society or nation.
- b To help the children develop rich humanity, recognize their own charm and individuality through interaction with others and foster mind of self-reliance.

Whereas, Indonesian Ministry of Education thinks that elementary school is the important basis to nurture young generation to be the whole person. It means that Indonesian citizen must be good at intellectual, physical, and moral aspects so that he can contribute positively to the nation and mutual understanding of international cooperation. Learning progress of elementary school will determine academic and non academic success in the upper level of education institution and society. In line with this matter, Indonesia works hard to create better academic atmosphere of elementary school. Curriculum, teacher quality improvement, budgeting are on the top priority for Indonesian government.

Japan and Indonesia promote school based curriculum to conduct teaching and learning process in elementary school. The government delegates the authority to design curriculum to each school since school itself know its target and circumstance very well. The teacher is supposed to design curriculum and teaching material according to the real situation of the class. Piaget proposes the idea of child development as the important psychological basis to design elementary school curriculum(Tanner and Tanner,1980). According to Piaget, psychological development of child is classified into some stages as follows:

1. Sensory Motor Stage(it happens in the first two years of baby): the baby uses physical organ and motor responses to deal with physical object and language.

2. Pre Operational stage(it happens at the age of 6 or 7): the child learns easily from the concrete thing.
3. Concrete Operational Stage(it happens at the age of 7 until 11): the child learns from the concrete thing and he begins to understand the abstract concept.
4. Formal Operational stage(it happens in the late child or early adolescence): a youngster learns to think hypothetically and to theorize and experiment.

We have good lesson that benefits us to study all aspects of Japanese elementary school. Japanese elementary school emphasizes creativity of its students. Japanese Ministry of Education has the school promote highly students' ability to view thing from different angles. Rohlen and Bjork(1998) suggest that relatively non-restrictive parenting promotes creativity in children. In this case, Japanese teacher is no longer a single source or a dominant actor in learning activity. He encourages the students to study, find the fact, and view the thing by themselves. He guides the students to plan learning activity in accordance with their own pace. Learning is not a process to transfer the knowledge to students but should involve the students in learning process.

Japanese teacher uses everything exist around the students as the teaching media and learning source. For example, he asks the students to measure the width of their own house in Geometry class. Then, he asks the students to find everything at home that is similar to the shape of triangle, cube, circle, and so forth. He also has the students measure the temperature of rice when their mothers already finish cooking the rice. The concept is in line with the idea of Astuti that Science class has to involve the students in learning process and relate the concept to the real situation so that the students understand the materials easily(Agus Mukti W,2009). Further, Hairur Rahman(2009) says that contextual teaching and learning is a means to facilitate the students understand the teaching material easily. This method has the students relate the concept to the real context, study the concrete objects and learn from everything around them.

Japanese school is not merely the place to teach knowledge and skill to the students but also the place to transfer value and culture to them. Daoed Joesoef and HAR Tilaar state that school is a teaching center as well as an education center(Kompas, July 8,2009). Japanese school teaches the children to be tough, persevering, highly optimistic, to have healthy mind and body. Solidarity and equality are suggested in Japanese school, team success is more important than individual success. Japanese school eliminates ranking system in academic report. Academic achievement is not stated in number but it is expressed in a statement. For example, the student does not get score 7, 8, or 9 in Math but the teacher states that he is

good at counting and data analysis however he still has to work hard for Geometry.

Sport class is important in Japanese school to keep healthy body and mind of students. Judo, aquatic sport, and athletic are compulsory activity in Sport class for Japanese elementary school students to make their body healthy, strong, and flexible to move. Japanese Ministry of Education has a special rule to recruit the teacher in Japanese school. The candidate of teacher has to master aquatic sport and other sport activities like martial arts, games, athletic as well as one musical instrument(especially piano).

Homemaking and handicraft are intensified in Japanese school to nurture young generation to be tough, patient, creativity, and to endure in severe condition. The school teaches the students household activities like cooking, ironing, knitting, sewing, and handicraft activities. Homemaking and handicraft not only relate to skill aspect but also relate to mental aspect.

Moral education is included in the curriculum of Japanese and Indonesian elementary school. Moral education in Indonesian school is connected to Religion subject and Moral education subject. It is intended to develop well rounded person among the students so that they have good personality, highly self esteem, respect others, appreciate social norms, promote mutual understanding of international cooperation and so forth. But, Indonesian school emphasizes theoretical aspect for religion and moral education subjects. There is still formal evaluation on the two subjects, mostly in written test.

Moral education is formally included in Japanese School in 1958. It is compulsory subject for elementary school and junior high school. However, it is an elective subject for senior high school and popularly called Ethics. Japanese teacher should relate moral education to all school subjects. Moral education discusses some topics as follows: concerning myself, concerning the relationship between others, concerning nature and noble things, concerning group and society. Japanese school emphasizes moral practical ability for moral education subject. For example, the student should realize that he has no choice to have a color skin, he can express his idea freely but he has to respect others' idea and so on. The curriculum suggests that there is no formal evaluation on moral education subject. The evaluation focuses on daily practical behavior of students.

Japan and Indonesia have similarity in class management of elementary school. Class management in Japanese and Indonesian elementary school is self-contained class not departmentalization. It means that the teacher manages all subjects of a class. The teacher is not supposed to teach a certain subject according to his own field. The two countries promote theme based teaching method or thematic method in learning

process in elementary school. The teacher describes the topic of learning material from many different angles and relates the topic to multidisciplinary subjects. When the teacher teaches about fish; he can teach biology, geography, and language. For example he teaches life cycle of fish, the area where fish live, and he can ask the students to write a composition about fish.

Table 1: Curriculum Structure of Indonesian Elementary School

Component	Class and Time Allocation			
	1	2	3	4, 5, and 6
1. Religion Subject				3
2. Moral Education				2
3. Indonesian				5
4. Math				5
5. Social Science				4
6. Basic Science				3
7. Arts and Handicraft				4
8. Health and Sport Education				4
Local Content				2
Personality Development				2
	26	27	28	32

Table 2: Standard Number of Yearly School Hours in Japanese Elementary School

Subject	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year	4 th year	5 th year	6 th year
Japanese Language	306	315	280	280	210	210

Social Studies			105	105	105	105
Arithmetic	136	175	175	175	175	175
Science			105	105	105	105
Life Environment Studies	102	105				
Music	68	70	70	70	70	70
Drawing and Handicraft	68	70	70	70	70	70
Homemaking					70	70
Physical Education	102	105	105	105	105	105
Moral Education	34	35	35	35	35	35
General Subject	34	35	35	70	70	70
Total	850	910	980	1,015	1,015	1,015

C. English Learning in Indonesian and Japanese Elementary School

Robert Lado(1961) says that language is ever present in human activity and thinking. Language is more than the apparently simple stream of sound that flows from the tongue. It is a complex system of communication with various levels of complexity involving intricate selection and ordering of meanings, sounds, and larger units and arrangement. Further, Brown(1987)) states that few if any, people achieve fluency in foreign language solely within the confines of the classroom.

An initial step to include English in elementary school curriculum started formally from 1994 following the decree of Indonesian Minister of National Education no. 060/U/1993 (Kasihani,2004). In East Java province, the implementation of English for elementary school is based on the decree of East Java local board of education no. 1702/105/1994. These regulations say that English is included in elementary school curriculum as a local content. Local content is classified into compulsory subject and optional subject. Local language belongs to compulsory subject and other subjects like traditional dance, traditional music, tourism, and English belong to optional subject. As is said by Mudjito, the Director of Kindergarten and Primary Education of Indonesian Ministry of Education, that English has been included as the course content of elementary school for many years but few Indonesian elementary schools which taught English to the

students until 1980s. The government decides that English is given to the students beginning from the fourth year level. But many elementary schools in the end of 1990s started teaching English to the students as early as possible, English is given to the students even in the first year level.

Brown (1987) states that it is advantageous to start language learning in the early stage because young learners are less frightened to make trial and error. Young learners always concentrate on meaning and do not care language form. And they are easy to practice pronunciation because of their flexible muscles. Lenneberg and Bickerton propose the idea of critical period in language learning (Brown,1987). When the brain's maturation ceases and lateralization is completed, then language learning becomes difficult. The critical period is at the age of puberty. Marcelino says that child's memory is stronger than adult's memory so it will make it easier for the children to memorize new vocabulary (Annita Kurniawati,2003). The study by Sri Rachmajanti and Gunadi (2001) and Annita Kurniawati (2003) shows that Indonesian teachers, parents, and students have positive attitude for English teaching in elementary school level.

Aside from that, some Indonesian scholars like Istiati Soetomo, Dibyo Wicaksono, and J. Drost give the opposite opinion of teaching English to elementary school students(ibid,2003). They say that teaching English to elementary school students is not effective because the students use Indonesian and local languages in daily communication, and teaching English cause confusion to the development of Indonesian and local languages of the students. English teaching is just for the prestige of parents.

English teaching in Indonesia is conducted using some language learning approaches. Curriculum 1947 uses grammar translation method in English class. Curriculum 1968 uses oral approach as a method of English teaching. Curriculum 1975 uses oral/audio-lingual approach to conduct English learning activity. And curriculum 1994 uses communicative approach in English activity (Hatta and Isnoewarti Soejoto,2002).

Yahya Muhaimin, the former Indonesian Minister of National Education, says that the aim of English teaching for elementary school student is to prepare the future generation of Indonesia to enter the global and free trade era (www.Jawapos.com). Then, Shofyanis states that English teaching for elementary school students is aimed at broadening students' knowledge and aiding students' ability to communicate with the international world (Annita Kurniawati, 2003).

Curriculum 2006 continues curriculum 1994 to use communicative approach in English teaching. It is an approach to foreign language teaching that the goal of language learning is communicative

competence (Richards et al, 1992). According to curriculum 2006, the students have to master four language skills to communicate in English at certain literacy level. Literacy level includes performative, functional, informational, and epistemic level. Performative level means the students are able to apply the language in four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Functional level means the students are able to use English for daily necessity like reading newspaper, hint, manual, and so forth. Informational level means the students are able to use English to access information, knowledge and technology. Epistemic level means the students are able to use English to transfer knowledge and technology. Curriculum 2006 suggests contextual learning and task or activity based learning as learning method to conduct English activity in elementary school. In curriculum 2006, these methods are called language accompanying action and here-and-now method. Contextual learning means learning activity should be related to students' experience and school or classroom environment. Task based learning means a learning activity which is organized around tasks such as telephone conversation, drawing a picture, cooking traditional food and others (Richards et al, 1992).

Mudjito, the Director of Kindergarten and Primary Education of Indonesian Ministry of Education, suggests that English teaching is given to elementary school student in two hours per week and should be conducted in a flexible way and relaxed situation so the students are confident to express their ideas in English. The student is free to use English with local dialects such as Sundanese English, Javanese English, Madurese English or Indonesian English. Balint says that it is useless and wastes the time to make the learner communicate like native speaker (Matsuhata et al, 1985). Hamid Hasan states that variety in students' cultural background affects learning style of students so that learning activity should adapt to students' characteristics to get satisfactory level of learning achievement.

Language learning problems don't end in the matter of how to teach or how to learn but we have to be concerned with the matter of determining the learning material that facilitates the better language learning activity of students (Littlewood, 1981). He underlies that language learning is related to the existence of language learner inside and outside the classroom. To develop English learning material for the students who encounter English easily outside the classroom is different from to develop learning material for the students who are limited to encounter English outside the classroom. Littlewood says that language learning must be intentionally structured to give adequate exposure to the language and keep students' motivation. Language learning or teaching has to make sense to the students (Cameron, 2001). Language teaching plan must be practical and facilitates the language learning of students. Cameron emphasizes that teaching can never guarantee learning, it just construct

opportunities for learning to help the learners take advantage of them. How to teach and what to teach are the most concerned problems of language learning process.

Aside from that, the current trend of language teaching adapts the learning material to the natural talent of learners (www.jawapos.com). The learning material must be in line with the learners' talent. In this case, the learners are classified into some groups. There are visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and auditory digital types of learners. Visual type of learner is easy to understand the material through picture or other visual aids. Auditory type of learner is very good at listening so listening activity is much emphasized in language learning by using audio aids. Kinesthetic type of learner is good at learning language through actions. Auditory digital type of learner has good analytical thinking, the learning material should facilitate the learners' development in cognitive aspect.

Cameron (2001) proposes theme-based learning and task-based learning to design language learning activity. Van Geert (1995) says that classroom tasks and activities are seen as the environment or ecosystem in which the growth of skills in the foreign language takes place (Cameron,2001). Children as mentally active learners always try to find a meaning and purpose for activities that are presented to them (ibid,2001). Widdowson (1990) and Breen (1984) states that authenticity of text is too difficult as a requirement but authenticity of activity, or of interaction of learner and text, is more desirable (ibid,2001). Further, Willis (1996) says that task-based learning locates real-ness in outcome, with learners working together to do things like solve a problem, do a puzzle, play a game or share and compare experiences (ibid,2001). The essential notion of theme-based teaching is that many different activities are linked together by their content; theme or topic runs through everything that happens in the classroom and acts as connecting thread for learners and teacher (ibid,2001).

Theme-based learning and task-based learning are interconnected and helpful to manage communicative activity of language learning. These approaches are useful to facilitate the students to use English during the English class. Theme like family, occupation, food, sport is developed through some activities during English class. For example when the teacher chooses Indonesia as a topic of language learning; he can arrange some activities of English learning for the students like cooking Indonesian food, playing traditional games of Indonesia and the like. The teacher must be concerned with classroom management to do teaching process using theme-based learning and task-based learning so that English activity runs effectively.

English teaching for young learner is a dilemma. On one side, the children are naturally enthusiastic and active in language learning

(Cameron,2001 and Littlewood,1981). It is invaluable asset to start language learning as early as possible at young age. On the other side, learning foreign language can be traumatic to children (Kasihani,2004). Further, Kasihani says that English is different from the mother tongue of Indonesian children in pronunciation, spelling, structure, and intonation. The availability of professional English teacher is crucial in Indonesia. 80 % of English teachers does not qualify for English teaching for young learners(Kasihani,2004). Conny Semiawan says that the availability of professional teacher is a factor to improve education quality(Dedi Supriadi,2003). The other factors are principal's management to empower school resources effectively, management quality of education, cohesion and networking of elements involved in education such as school, parents, community, business organization and so on. Management quality of education is related to the equal distribution of teacher across the country and the zero quantity of mismatch teacher. Kasihani(2004) identifies some problems related to teacher's qualification such as English proficiency, teaching skill, and evaluation. Kasihani quotes the idea of Fillmore that children who develop English successfully are under the guidance of the teacher with good English proficiency. Among 520 teachers who join with national training program by Indonesian Ministry of Education, only 11 % of them belong to intermediate I level until advance level of TOEIC score(Hatta and Isnoewarti Soejoto,2002). From the study, Kasihani finds that few teachers can use teaching media properly and design learning material based on local characteristics. Her study also shows that few teachers can do evaluation in language learning. Further, Kasihani notes the positive factor of learning foreign language in Indonesian elementary school. Indonesian students use alphabet as it is in English, it can be a facility for the students to learn English.

English Activity in Japanese elementary school is included in general subject(Sogo). The goal of English activity is to achieve communicative competence among the students. Japanese Ministry of Education(Monbukagakusho) decides that the important skills in English activity are listening and speaking. The syllabus is developed using eclectic method that includes community language learning and communicative language teaching. English activity is conducted in more relaxed situation and the role of teacher is a counselor and facilitator to facilitate learning process. Native English teacher as assistant language teacher(ALT) often involves in English class to do team teaching with Japanese Teacher of English(JTE).

Teaching material is developed based on task-based activity and theme-based activity. And there is no official English textbook in Japanese elementary school. The teacher and ALT define a certain activity during the English class. It is intended to encourage the students to use English in the real situation. Theme like sport, family, shopping, food, and others is

developed as learning material and it is done through some activities like games, cooking practice and so forth. While the students are doing activity, the teachers' instructions and class interaction are conducted in English. Through activity, the students are encouraged to use English not to learn about English. And the involvement of ALT in English activity gives the student a good model of communication practice and much opportunity to understand other people's culture.

English activity is to prepare the students' future life with some concerned problems like globalization, the aging society, industrialization, international free trade era, the advancement of science and technology. English activity has the main objectives as follows:

- a. To improve communicative competence of the students in English.
- b. To communicate with Assistant Language Teacher (Native English Teacher) in order to understand the culture and characteristics of other nation especially English speaking country.
- c. To have longer time of English learning in order to have more chance to improve communicative competence.

Japanese Ministry of Education defines national standard for curricula of all school levels to ensure national standard of education (Watanabe and Sasahara, 2002). But, the school has latitude to design syllabus based on school circumstance, students' characteristics, and their mental and physical development stage. Japanese elementary school design syllabus for English activity based on the guideline by the Ministry of Education that covers language situation, language function, and language element.

Language Situation

- a. Situation where fixed expressions are often used like greetings, self-introduction, phone call, shopping, giving directions, traveling, etc.
- b. Situation relevant to students' lives such as home life, learning and activities at school, regional events, etc.

Language Function

- a. Deepening thinking and transmitting information like giving opinion, explaining, reporting, presenting, etc.
- b. Instigating action and expressing volition such as asking questions, requesting, inviting, offering, confirming, promising, agreeing/disagreeing, accepting/refusing, etc.
- c. Transmitting feeling such as expressing gratitude, complaining, praising, apologizing, etc.

Language Element

a. Speech Sounds

1. Contemporary standard pronunciation
2. Sound changes result from combination of words
3. Basic word, phrase, and sentence stresses
4. Basic sentence intonation
5. Basic pause in sentence

b. Letter and Symbols

1. Lower and upper case printed letters of alphabet
2. Basic symbols like period, question mark, comma, quotation mark, etc.
3. Basic collocation and idioms:
 - a. 900 words related to everyday life such as season, month, day, number, family, etc.
 - b. basic collocations.
 - c. basic idioms like excuse me, I see, I'm sorry, thank you, you are welcome, etc.

c. Grammatical Items

1. Sentences
 - a. Simple, compound and complex sentences.
 - b. Affirmative and negative declarative sentence.
 - c. Affirmative and negative imperative sentence.
 - d. Interrogative with auxiliary and WH questions.

d. Sentence Pattern

1. Subject + Verb
2. Subject + Verb + Complement
 - Subject + be + noun, pronoun, adjective
 - Subject + non be + noun, adjective
3. Subject + Verb + O
Subject + Verb + noun, pronoun, gerund, to-infinitive, a clause beginning with that.

e. Pronoun

1. Personal, demonstrative, interrogative and quantitative pronouns.
2. Basic restrictive uses of relative pronouns that, which, and who used in the nominative case, and that and which used in objective case.

D. Conclusion

Both Indonesia and Japan value highly the important and significant role of elementary school to nurture young generation to be the whole person. Japan is very concerned with the personality of her citizen. Intelligence is important but good personality is more important. Good personality, popularly called soft skills, makes someone survive and adapt to any condition. Creativity, toughness, patience, endurance to any situation are often connected to good personality. Schools subjects like moral education, sport, handicraft and homemaking are significant to nurture the children to be strong and flexible to move, healthy in mind and body, optimistic, sportive, sincerity, tolerant, and to endure in any situation.

The two countries suggest contextual teaching and learning in learning activity for all subjects of elementary school. Class management of elementary school in Japan and Indonesia is self-contained class. The teacher manages to teach all subjects of a class not one teacher teaches a certain subject according to his own field. Solidarity and team success are important for Japan as vulnerable country. In line with this matter, ranking system is eliminated in Japanese school and academic report is not written in number but in a statement.

English is introduced to elementary school students in Japan and Indonesia. It is useful for the children to prepare themselves for future global competition and understanding others' language and culture. Teaching English for young learners is still a dilemma. One side, the children are easy to practice pronunciation well. On the other side, English learning can be traumatic for them. Both Japan and Indonesia face some problems of teaching English for young learners such as teacher quality, facility, and students' exposure to the language.

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