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Quantitative Descriptive Analysis of Students' Speaking Progression Using VARK Materials

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A B S T R A C T

The Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia requires student-centered learning through Differentiated Instruction (DI). However, inflexible textbook approaches often fail to accommodate diverse learning styles, creating a pedagogical gap in speaking skills development. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of VARK-based differentiated materials in supporting the speaking progression of sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri. Students were grouped by learning style (visual, auditory, read/write, kinaesthetic) and evaluated on three criteria: speaking clearly, using English words, and understanding and answering. Quantitative analysis revealed a consistent upward trend, with mean score gains of +7.32 in speaking clearly, +6.94 in using English words, and +6.90 in understanding and answering. These findings indicate that aligning sensory input with the VARK model effectively overcome textbook limitations, providing a practical framework to systematically enhance primary students' English-speaking skills.

Keywords: *Differentiated Instruction, VARK Learning Styles, Speaking Skills, Grouping, Young Learners.*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 18th century, English has grown into the primary international language. As the result, understanding English has become an essential requirement for training professionals to compete on an international level (Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018). To succeed in English language learning, students must develop all four macro skills namely speaking, reading, listening, and writing (Artini et al., 2020). Speaking is one of the most essential productive skills for everyday interaction. The current Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia places a strong emphasis on this communication activities in primary English education. Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) aims to develop basic conversation ability and students' confidence rather than rigid grammatical rules.

However, developing oral communication skills at elementary school level presents numerous real problems. Young learners frequently have common speaking difficulties, such as lack of ideas, extreme shyness, a lack of personal confidence, a constant anxiety of making mistakes, a restricted vocabulary, and incorrect pronunciation. These primary challenges are frequently made worse by students' high levels of anxiety, nervousness, overcrowded classroom sizes, and a noticeable lack of learning media that are tailored to individual needs of learning styles (Aditya et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2022; Safitri & Misdi, 2021; Syafrizal et al., 2020).

The existing resources used in primary schools contribute to this instructional mismatch. A preliminary interview with sixth-grade English teachers at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri reveals that the learning process in mainly reliant on single, uniform textbook by the government, "My Next Words" for grade six. However, this primary learning source does

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not sufficiently accommodate various learning styles. This issue is consistent with a study conducted by Pradnyandari et al. (2024), which discovered that the "My Next Words" grade six textbook has a very limited ability to give different information depending on VARK (Visual, Auditory, Read/Write. Kinesthetic) learning styles. The book only partially addresses students' sensory preferences, and the instruction offered lacks clear guidelines for teachers to conduct differentiated learning. As a result, existing resources have become monotonous, offer limited diversity, and fail to bridge the gap between teachers and students in order to meet the Merdeka Curriculum's goal.

Furthermore, present textbook exercises tend to limit spontaneous speech development. This essential problem is strongly reinforced by Fadila et al. (2025), who evaluated the My Next Words textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum. They emphasized that many textbooks concentrated on vocabulary memorization, spelling drills, and comprehension assessments in which students just had to recall content or match words to pictures. As a result, such repetitious and memory-based tasks limit students' opportunity to practice speaking naturally and spontaneously in real-world contexts. This problem is made worse by the fact that teachers do not typically undertake an initial examination or diagnostic to determine their students' learning styles and preferences. As a result, the learning process becomes uniform and ignores students' specific preferences or abilities, therefore preventing the development of an effective language learning environment.

To evaluate the direct consequences of these classroom conditions, an initial speaking assessment was administered prior to the implementation of this study at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri. The baseline data collected from sixth-grade participants revealed a significant restriction in their speaking skills. Specifically, the diagnostic test revealed that only 3.4% of the students achieved excellent performance, 23.6% performed at a moderate level, and a large majority of students, 73.0% scored below average. This factual evidence clearly shows that most young learners encounter significant challenges while speaking English, largely because traditional instructional activities do not provide enough space or meaningful practice for productive language development, such as speaking.

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is an essential learning approach that fully considers student diversity in today's classroom setting (Putra, 2023). Moving away from traditional, restrictive models, DI intentionally adapts teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of the students, taking consideration of various aspects such as students' background knowledge, academic readiness, unique learning profiles, and intrinsic interests within the same shared classroom (Ab Hajis & Othman, 2024; Ouyang & Ye, 2023). This basic approach, pionareed by Carol Ann Tomlinson, enables instructors to give many strategic options for their students to study successfully and efficiently , ensuring that each learner advances as quickly as possible and ideally as possible (Tomlinson, 2014). Recent empirical evidence in young learner contexts suggests that shifting away from a homogeneous, one-size-fits-all approach is directly related to reduced foreign language anxiety and increased student independence in early educatin setting (Green & Towson, 2022). As a result, DI handles classroom student diversity significantly more effectively than traditional approaches since it recognizes that each student has their own individual learning style preference (Desinguraj & Gnanam, 2021). While some students learn best in groups, other make the most progress by working alone, doing specialized task , or participating in collaborative conversations. Within foregin language education, this learner-centered phylosophy become highly operationalized through specific tactical modifications of the curriculum.

Differentiated Instruction in ELT focused modification across four main educational areas, including differentiating content, process, assignments, and stuctural evaluations (Ouyang & Ye, 2023). To do this effectively, teacher must distingush three critical learning areas: content (input), which is directly related to students' knowledge, and initial learning absorption; process, which determines how students physically obtain information or learn; and product, which demonstrates how the student actively demonstrates what they have learned (Andini, 2016; Heacox, 2012; Tomlinson, 2014). This is particularly important, as

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previous studies have identified a strong relationship between students' learning preferences and their speaking skills (Rahayu et al., 2022). As a result, primary educators must be highly aware of student variability and provide indivisually customized sensory instruction to ensure successful language absorption for each individual student.

To effectively implement this customized sensory instruction at the content input level, educators must first understand the fundamental frameworks governing students' sensory learning styles. Learning styles represent an individdual's unique capacity to absorb, process, and internalize new information efficiently based on their personal cognitive ability (Alhafizh, 2022; Munawaroh & Nugraheni, 2023). Modern language pedagogy usually emphasizes Neil Fleming's VARK framework as a very practical framework for detecting and classifying classroom variety. The VARK model classifies young learners into four sensory preferences: visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic. Visual learners, in particular, benefit from graphical connection tracking, which uses diagrams, maps, and instructive movies to anchor new spoken words (Awla, 2014; Cabual, 2021; Tiwery & Ritiauw, 2022). In contrast, auditory learners achieve better learning outcomes through listening-based activities, verbal communication, and interactive discussions, where repeated exposure to spoken information and mnemonic techniques strengthen long-term memory retention (Anggraeny & Dewi, 2023; Cabual, 2021). Read/write learners, on the other hand, perform best when engaging with text-oriented tasks, such as reading extensively, taking detailed notes, and expressing ideas through writing (Cabual, 2021). Meanwhile, kinesthetic learners acquire knowledge more effectively through hands-on experiences, physical movement, and the use of tangible materials that support active participation in the learning process (Anggraeny & Dewi, 2023; Cabual, 2021). According to Gilakjani (2012), recognizing these distinct learning preferences is essential because it encourages primary students to become more responsible for their own learning while enabling them to adapt more effectively to classroom instruction. In the context of primary foreign language acquisition, this sensory alignment yields its most profound impact on the development of productive output, particularly speaking skills.

Among the four language skills, speaking is often considered one of the most essential as well as the most demanding because it serves as the foundation for effective daily communication and real-world language use (Artini et al., 2020; Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018). Brown (2004) defines speaking as an interactive process in which learners construct meaning through the simultaneous production, reception, and processing of language. Likewise, Cameron (2001) explains that speaking requires learners to actively use the target language to communicate their ideas and intentions effectively. To become competent speakers, young learners need to gradually develop linguistic accuracy, fluency, contextual appropriateness, and vocabulary knowledge (Meilyaningsih, 2015). This development depends on mastering five fundamental components proposed by Brown (2004) and Rao (2019): pronunciation, which supports clear articulation and appropriate intonation; grammar, which ensures the correct arrangement of words and sentences; vocabulary, which provides the linguistic resources needed to express ideas; fluency, which enables smooth and continuous speech with minimal hesitation; and comprehension, which allows learners to understand messages and respond appropriately according to the context.

However, the empirical development of these speaking components in a foreign language classroom is constantly influenced by a complex interaction of both internal and external factors. According to Ibna Seraj & Habil (2021), instructors must have a strong understanding of these fundamental factors in order to strategically help students in overcoming long-term oral communication difficulties. Speaking performance is affected by various situational factors, including the amount of time available for planning, time limitations during task completion, and the availability of support from peers or teachers, all of which influence learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-time. In addition, oral language production is strongly shaped by psychological factors, as explained in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that emotional variables can either facilitate or hinder language learning (Krashen, 1986). In contrast, high levels of self-confidence and

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learning motivation help reduce the affective filter, allowing young learners to participate more actively in speaking activities and communicate more spontaneously despite their limited language proficiency. In addition to emotional factors, speaking development is also closely related to learners' listening comprehension and the provision of timely, constructive feedback from teachers (Ibna Seraj & Habil, 2021). Furthermore, familiarity with the topic and the appropriateness of instructional materials play an essential role in improving oral performance. Elementary students tend to speak more fluently when learning activities are based on familiar contexts and engaging materials. Therefore, differentiated learning materials are essential because they accommodate learners' diverse background knowledge and sensory preferences, creating a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment that promotes the development of speaking skills.

Although numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits of Differentiated Instruction (DI) across various educational contexts, limited empirical evidence has explored its integration with sensory-based learning modalities in primary education, particularly within the implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum. Previous studies on DI in EFL settings have mainly focused on higher education and secondary vocational schools (Kurniawan et al., 2025; Purnamaningwulan, 2024; Sada et al., 2024). Although there is a distinct need to replicate this success at the primary school level within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, as highlighted by Wahdaniah et al. (2025) even in source-limited areas, evidence remaining specific to criteria-based speaking skill among young learners is still limited. Furthermore, while Nurelviani & Prastyo (2024) revealed that DI yields significant gains in fluency and pronunciation, their focus did not break down the specific visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic tracks mapped directly to primary student criteria.

Furthermore, Putri et al. (2024) successfully developed culturally relevant VARK-based instructional materials for primary school students and confirmed their validity. However, the study ended at the development stage and did not provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the materials in improving students' classroom speaking performance. In addition, previous studies involving primary school students have generally evaluated speaking ability as a whole, with limited attention to specific speaking criteria, such as speaking clearly, using English words appropriately, and understanding as well as responding to spoken language.

This resulted in a lack of empirical evidence explaining how sensory-based differentiated instruction influences these specific aspects of speaking performance. This gap provides limited practical guidance for teachers who wish to implement differentiated learning based on students' sensory preferences. Therefore, further classroom-based research is needed to move beyond material validation and examine the actual effectiveness of VARK-differentiated instructional materials. The present study addresses this gap by providing quantitative evidence of primary school students' development in speaking clearly, using English words, and understanding and answering through the implementation of VARK-based differentiated instruction.

As the result, this targeted quantitative descriptive study aims to answer the question: How does the implementation of VARK-based differentiated materials support the speaking progression of sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri? This study specifically utilizes four units of the developed materials by Putri et al. (2024), namely Unit 1 "I will go to Bromo", Unit 2 "I will go to Dufan", Unit 3 "I will study at Junior High School next year", and Unit 4 "I want to be a pilot". These units are used to assess the impact of differentiated materials on students' English speaking skills, which are tested using simplified competencies such as speaking clearly, using English words, and understanding and answering. The researcher of this study adapted Brown's speaking evaluation rubric into three primary aspects that are suited to sixth-grade students.

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METHOD

Respondents

The participants in this study were selected from a primary education setting in North Bali. The study was conducted in SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri, which located in Singaraja, Bali. This study used a quantitative descriptive research design, with a primary focus on mapping, exploring, and assessing raw empirical data points gathered from the first pre-test and the final post-test phase. Rather than using inferential statistics to generalize to a larger population or identify absolute causal relationships, this method aimed to comprehensively describe the progression of speaking behaviours in a specific setting.

The sample of the study consisted of one intact classroom of 31 sixth-grade young learners, consisting of 16 male and 15 female students. The participants fell within a specific age range of 11 to 12 years old, which represents the transitional cognitive development stage from concrete operational to formal operational thinking. This particular group was chosen because they initially demonstrated low oral English performance during preliminary observations, with the majority of them unable to speak spontaneously in standard classroom interactions.

Instruments

To assess students' speaking improvement, a standardized oral interview test was conducted at two intervals: before treatment (pre-test) and after treatment (post-test). To guarantee absolute scoring objectivity and reduce bias, a strict two-rater methos was implemented to analyze the students' speaking skills. Brown (2004) defined the fundamental language testing components, which served as the foundation for the speaking assessment framework. This rucric was simplified into three major criteria adapted to the cognitive ability of sixth-grade elementary students:

Speaking Clarity

This criteria assessed the students' basic pronunciation, mouth articulation, and fluency, noting whether speech pauses or hesitation interfered with message clarity.

Using English Words

This criteria evaluated students' vocabulary selection, and usage of basic grammatical structures to express themselves properly.

Understanding and Answering

This criteria assesses students' ability to comprehend and respond to verbal prompts and questions in context. To systematically identify and classify the students' individual learning style, a diagnostic VARK learning style questionnaire was administered. The instrument utilized in this study was adopted from a contextualized VARK questionnaire developed by Pradnyandari et al., (2024) in an unpublished undergraduate thesis accessible through the university's library repository. To ensure maximum accessibility and eliminate potential language barriers for young learners, the instrument was presented entirely in Indonesian.

Procedures

The learning intervention was carried out over eight intensive classroom sessions, all within the context of Merdeka Curriculum. To guarantee thorough and systematic implementation, the researcher chose four particular units from the active semester syllabus, and each unit was fully taught during two consecutive meetings. These units were selected from Putri et al. (2024) VARK-based differentiated materials, which were purposely constructed to exactly align with the main units in the government-issued sixth-grade English textbook "My Next Words". The selected units were Unit 1 "I will go to Bromo", Unit 2 "I will

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go to Dufan", Unit 3 "I will study at Junior High School next year", and Unit 4 "I want to be a pilot".

The language learning objectives were consistent across the class, but instructional delivery varied based on the topic input. Students were allocated to one of four small groups depending on their determined sensory preferences, and they interacted only with items custom-designed for their learning styles: (1) The visual group focused on observation and graphical connections by watching educational videos and interacting with digital spinning wheels or matching games on Word wall to analyse future plans and professions. Students also manipulated physical materials by cutting and pasting images, sketching icons or emoji to express specific emotions and using arrows to map out structural sentence components. (2) The auditory group centered on active listening, phonetics, and vocal reproduction by analysing recorded audio tracks and spoken dialogues about future intentions, time markers, and job descriptions. To capture exact vocal inflections, students practiced focused listening with closed eyes, listed down spoken vocabulary from the audio, and repeated sentences aloud to match native intonation patterns. (3) The read/write group emphasized textual analysis, structural decoding, and written composition by reading specific passages, such as "My family's vocation" and "Raka's Idea", to identify and underline target language features. Students actively extracted grammatical structures from the texts to recognize core formulas, such as (S + Will + V1), and independently drafted their own sentences following these models. (4) The kinaesthetic group prioritized physical movement and experiential role-play by physically handling activity cards to construct sentences. They also utilized targeted physical gestures, such as placing a hand behind the ear for the phrase "Pardon me?" if they did not hear their friend's plan, and walked around the classroom to interview peers, record real-world responses, and engage in professional interview simulation role-plays.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The quantitative data analysis indicates an improvement in students' speaking skills after completing eight instructional sessions. Table 1 shows the classroom general scoring parameters, which include the initial baseline and final evaluation.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test General Scores for the Class

Phase of Evaluation	N	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test	31	17	25	31.06	7.937
Post-Test	31	46	60	41.65	10.019
Mean Gain		+29	+35	+10.59	+2.082

The quantitative data reported in Table.1 shows that the students' baseline speaking performance yielded a pre-test mean score of 31.06. This score was recorded alongside the oral limitation and passive communication patterns noted during the early observations phase. However, following the structured group tasks using VARK-based materials, the post-test mean score increased to 41.59. This development results in a descriptive mean gain of +10.59 points, pointing to an encouraging progression in the students' verbal responses.

To examine the nature of student language progression, the composite scores were broken down into three components assessed by the two raters. Table.2 presents the descriptive metrics calculated from the evaluation records.

Table 2. Progression Trajectory Across Speaking Criteria

Speaking Assessment Criteria	Pre-test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Gain
C1: Speaking Clearly	20.71	28.03	+7.32
C2: Using English Words	19.87	26.81	+6.94
C3: Understanding and Answering	21.55	28.45	+6.90

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As seen in Table.2, positive progress was observed in all three assessed criteria, with Criterion 1 showing the most growth. Under C1 (Speaking Clearly), students began with a baseline mean of 20.71 and improved to a post-test mean of 28.03, resulting in a gain of +7.32. For Criterion 2 (Using English Words), the mean score increased from 19.87 during the pre-test to 26.81 during the post-test, resulting in a gain of +6.94. The students' mean score in the last category, Criterion 3 (Understanding and Answering), went from 21.55 to 28.45 at the post-test, showing a +6.90 improvement.

Qualitative notes from structures classroom observations strongly supported quantitative changes. Students from all learning styles groups looked hesitant in the first few sessions, relying largely on the teacher's instructions due to shyness and fear of making mistakes. However, as the differentiated group tracks were introduced into the routine, the children's active participation increased. Students demonstrated high enthusiasm and increased activity when interacting with their group's specific tasks, such as playing interactive Wordwall games in the visual group, mimicking native intonation in the auditory group, extracting grammatical formulas in the read/write group, or conducting peer interviews with physical gestures in the kinesthetic group.

Discussion

The descriptive progression of the data shows that providing English materials that allow different learning styles through small groups is beneficial to sixth-grade students. The balanced improvements across all three criteria indicate that content differentiation can serve as an effective scaffolding tool. These results can be explained using Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1986). Young learners in traditional classrooms may experience tension, nervousness, and speaking apprehension when the teaching methods do not match their sensory preferences, resulting in passive quiet (Heriansyah, 2012; Safitri & Misdi, 2021). As Krashen (1986) notes, anxiety is a critical psychological aspect that causes learners to pause, sweat, and tremble when speaking, acting as a "filter" that can prevent the brain from absorbing or creating language. The VARK framework was used at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri, making the classroom environment more accessible. Allowing students to work in collaborative small groups and focus only on materials that fit their preferred style reduces psychological barriers, increased self-confidence, and encouraged motivation, encouraging students to keep trying despite linguistic obstacles.

The progression within each specific criterion directly follows the fundamental components of language development. The breakdown of the quantitative improvements provides a more detailed evaluation of how sensory-based differentiated instruction affects young learners' speaking skills.

Speaking Clearly

A positive mean gain of +7.32 indicates that providing appropriate sensory input to groups helped students effectively acquire proper pronunciation models and flowing intonation, managing the performance conditions crucial for oral clarity. This interpretation aligns with Nurelviani & Prastyo (2024), who confirmed that DI strategies lead to dignificant gains in pronunciation and speech clarity. For sixth-grade students, this oral precision was achieved by balancing all four learning styles simultaneously in the classroom. Visual learners anchored their pronunciation by observing clear imagery and flashcard models, while auditory learners refined their flowing intonation through active listening and mimicking native audio tracks. Simultaneously, read/write learners stabilized their speech by drilling textual scripts and sentence formulas before speaking, whereas kinesthetic learners reduced their speech hesitation by physically handling activity cards to construct sentences. Intertwining these four tracks effectively removed the cognitive load, allowing students across all learning styles to minimize long pauses and speak more clearly.

Using English Words

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The progress of +6.94 demonstrated that using sensory-specific materials substantially improved students' vocabulary recall an active word retrieval. Tailoring activities to student profiles satisfies the fundamental rule that productive skill development must be grounded in students' learning needs (Galora Moya & Salazar Tobar, 2018). This vocabulary expantion directly echoes the findings of Nurelviani & Prastyo (2024), yet the current study extends their conclusion by showing how the robust growth in vocabulary utilization was drived by unique memory cues tailored to each style. Visual track students accelerated word recall through interactive Wordwall games and vocabulary images, while auditory track students reinforced word choices by participating in pronunciation drills and focused listening-repetition exercises. Meanwhile, read/write track students built strong spelling and textual memory cues by extracting grammatical formulas textually and reading short stories, while kinesthetic track students internalized vocabulary meaning by acting out professional interview simulation role-plays. By providing these diverse entry points, students found it significantly easier to retrieve and use English words accurately during speaking tasks.

Understanding and Answering

The increase of +6.90 indicates a significant expansion in the students' interactive and listening comprehension capacity. As Ibna Seraj & Habil (2021), point out, speaking is strongly reliant on students' listening skills and constructive feedback. This sharp progression is consistently echoed by Aprianto & Sutarman (2025), whose quantitative analysis found that matching instruction to sensory learning styles yields higher speaking outcomes. The current study proves that interactive comprehension requires a multi-sensory approach where visual learners decoded meaning faster by linking oral prompts to contextual pictures, and auditory learners processed conversation efficiently by listening closely to the model audio recording and immediately applying the language by interviewing peers based on audio content. Simultaneously, read/write learners structured their answers systematically by processing written prompts and organizing their thoughts textually before responding, while kinesthetic learners drove the conversational flow by conducting peer interviews using physical gestures to signal understanding. Consequently, satisfying all four VARK preferences effectively reduced the psychological anxiety often associated with English speaking, matching the findings of Sada et al. (2024).

Pedagogically, these exploratory findings are consistent with the concept of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) in Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum. Rather than using a rigid, one-size-fits-all textbook approach, grouping classroom activities based on basic sensory learning styles create a positive, encouraging environment for young learners to improve their English speaking skills. As Tomlinson (2014) points out, differentiated instruction gives many opportunities for students to study effectively and effectively, successfully addressing student diversity within the same classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

This quantitative descriptive study aimed to evaluate how VARK-base differentiated English materials affect the speaking skills of sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri. This objective was achieved by implementing eight structured instructional sessions where learning activities were tailored to four learning styles: visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic. The findings confirm that this approach successfully enhanced students' overall speaking performance, showing consistent improvements across all three evaluated criteria: speaking clearly, using English words, and understanding and answering. By systematically matching instructional delivery with students' specific learning style preferences, the differentiated materials effectively reduced psychological barriers, accelerated vocabulary recall, and promoted active, contextual communication. Overall, integrating the VARK model into differentiated instruction serves as a practical scaffolding framework for primary school

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EFL classrooms, making foreign language acquisition more accessible and engaging for young learners.

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