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Analyzing the Effectiveness of Matric and CAIE Curricula in English Language Learning: A Pakistani Students' Perspective

ABSTRACT:

An English curriculum is a set of courses, lessons, and learning objectives that are designed to help students acquire the English language by fostering students' English writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills. The article investigates the effectiveness of the Matriculation system and Cambridge Assessment International Education curricula in teaching English language skills to students in Pakistan. The objective of this research is to compare these two educational systems and evaluate which of these two curricula better supports language acquisition and meets the needs of learners. For this purpose, the study recorded a total of 100 responses, which were obtained through random sampling, comprising 50 students enrolled in the Matric curriculum in class 10 at a public school and 50 students enrolled in the CAIE curriculum in 11th Cambridge at a private school in Multan, Pakistan. Data were collected using a questionnaire administered via Google Forms to evaluate the effectiveness of both the Matric and CAIE curricula in developing students' English writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills. The responses were then statistically analyzed by using SPSS. This study reveals that the CAIE curriculum effectively meets students' English language skills needs due to its improved learning environment. Future research should explore methods for implementing learning objectives.

KEY WORDS:

Matric and CAIE English Curriculum Effectiveness, English Language Skills Acquisition, Students' Perception

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Introduction

A curriculum is a comprehensive framework that outlines the educational content, learning experiences, objectives, and assessment methods within an educational system. Christison and Murray (2022) define curriculum as the name for the broadest organization of instruction, involving planning, teaching, and evaluating any plan for the teaching and learning of English.

According to Kelly (2009), a curriculum serves as a blueprint that guides the instruction and learning process, ensuring that students acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values throughout their educational journey. Marsh and Willis (2007) emphasize that a curriculum encompasses the planned interactions between students and educational materials, aligning instructional goals with broader educational policies and standards. Additionally, Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) highlight that a well-designed curriculum ensures coherence



between the objectives of education and the methods of content delivery, playing a crucial role in shaping educational outcomes.

In the curriculum, language plays a pivotal role in serving as the essential medium through which knowledge is transmitted, constructed, and assessed. As the primary means of communication, language not only facilitates the delivery of instructional content but also enables students to engage critically with that content, fostering deeper understanding and cognitive development. The overall academic success is based on the incorporation of language into the curriculum, which is fundamental for developing students' literacy and communicative competencies. According to Halliday (1978), the way individuals interpret and interact with the world is shaped by language, which functions as a social semiotic system that is integral to the educational process. Similarly, Mickan (2019) argues that language is the primary resource for learning, emphasizing its role in the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The curriculum, therefore, must be designed to reflect the centrality of language in knowledge-building and skill acquisition, ensuring that students are equipped with the linguistic tools necessary to navigate and succeed in a complex, information-rich society. This alignment between language and curriculum is vital for fostering not only academic achievement but also the broader development of students as informed and capable members of society.

The overarching aim of curriculum design is to establish coherence among policy, practice, and assessment through language. In Pakistan, secondary education is bifurcated into two primary curricula: the Matriculation (Matric) system, predominantly taught in public schools, and the Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) curriculum, offered in private schools. The Matric curriculum is aligned with the National Curriculum 2006 (NC-2006), a document issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) that emphasizes the functional use of English across academic and social contexts, prioritizing reading, writing, speaking, and grammar skills (Asghar & Butt, 2018; Azhar et al., 2020; Siddiqui, 2020). Conversely, the CAIE curriculum, developed by Cambridge University Press & Assessment, provides a global framework for cultivating knowledge, understanding, and skills, particularly in English as a second language (Cambridge International, 2022).

Curricula serve as a structured guide for developing the foundation of knowledge and enhancing students' learning and comprehension. Mastery of any language fundamentally hinges on the integrated development of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Reading skills involve the ability to decode written text, comprehend meaning, and critically analyze content. These skills include phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, and reading comprehension, all of which are essential for understanding and interpreting information effectively (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). On the other writing skills refer to the ability to express ideas clearly, coherently, and effectively through written text. These skills encompass grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and organization, as well as the ability to convey meaning for specific audiences and purposes (Hyland, 2019). Similarly, speaking skills involve the ability to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in verbal communication. These skills include pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary usage, and the ability to organize ideas logically for different contexts and audiences (Brown, 2007). In the same way, listening skills are also very important as they refer to the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages during the communication process. According to Brownell, active listening enhances the quality of communication by ensuring that the listener fully understands the speaker (Brownell, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the extent to which these two curricula—Matriculation and CAIE—facilitate the holistic improvement of English language skills among students. The focus is not on comparing individual language skills but on assessing the overall effectiveness of each curriculum in fostering language proficiency. To achieve this, the study will analyze the responses of students from both a public school and private school in Multan, Pakistan, providing a comparative evaluation of their respective educational frameworks through students' perceptions.

Statement of the Problem

This study has chosen this research topic to analyze the effectiveness of Matric and CAIE English curricula by evaluating the data obtained through the students' feedback. The study will draw tables to see the comparison of the students' feedback regarding their respective curricula.

Objective

To investigate the effectiveness of both Matric and CAIE curricula in improving English language skills through students' feedback obtained via an online questionnaire.

Research Question

- 1. What are students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the Matric curriculum in developing their English language skills at a public school in Multan, Pakistan?
- 2. What are students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the CAIE curriculum in developing their English language skills at a private school in Multan, Pakistan?

Literature Review

In recent years, the design and implementation of language curricula have taken on new significance, especially within the context of English as a global language. The widespread use of English in international communication, commerce, education, and media has elevated its role in the educational policies of many countries, positioning English language proficiency as a critical component of national development strategies (Goodwyn et al., <u>2014</u>).

Curriculum in language teaching refers to the design and implementation of language courses as well as to the nature of the teaching and learning that occurs as curricula are implemented. The nature of the world and the role of English within it have changed substantially in recent years because of globalization and the spread of English as an international language (Richards, <u>2017</u>).

Consequently, in Pakistan, there are two popular options for secondary education in the English language: O-Level and Matriculation. O-Level, also known as the Ordinary Level, is an internationally recognized curriculum developed by the University of Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE). It offers a broad range of subjects, encouraging critical thinking, practical application, and analytical skills. On the other hand, Matriculation follows the curriculum set by the local educational boards in Pakistan, emphasizing a standardized educational system across the country (Shaina-mansoori, <u>2023</u>).

O-Level strongly emphasizes English language skills, enabling students to communicate effectively and compete on a global scale. It focuses on written and oral language proficiency, giving students an edge in their academic and professional careers. While matriculation prioritizes language skills as extensively, potentially limiting a student's proficiency and competence in English (Shaina-mansoori, <u>2023</u>).

The discussion over the effectiveness of the Matriculation (Matric) and Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) curricula in Pakistan's English language learning landscape is complicated. The importance of English cannot be ignored when we talk about the country's development and progress. As education is promoted in the nation, this reduces the illiteracy rate, which ultimately reduces unemployment (Ahmad & Arshad, 1991).

In terms of academic rigor and depth, O-Level is known for its holistic approach to education, focusing on a comprehensive understanding while promoting critical thinking (Shaina-mansoori, <u>2023</u>). According to an article in Dawn News, O Level books are a lot more interesting to read, and topics provide a lot of detail. This helps to imbed the concepts well in mind. Some subjects and their syllabus are such that you can do self-study and take the exam if you wish to do so (Raja, <u>2019</u>).

On the other hand, the Matric books are quite bland, and if you don't have a teacher beside you, you cannot comprehend most of the concepts. This makes self-studying quite difficult (Raja, <u>2019</u>).

Raza and Coombe (2022) criticize the matric curriculum for its outdated and rigid structure, which relies heavily on rote memorization and textbook-based learning. Studies have shown that this method may not sufficiently develop students' communicative competence, as it lacks focus on interactive and applied language skills (Raza & Coombe, 2022).

On the other hand, the CAIE educational plan, ordinarily adopted in private schools, is adulated for its open language showing approach, which underscores language use settings, decisive reasoning, and logical abilities. This approach adjusts more intimately to worldwide norms and better plans for understudies for advanced education and expert conditions (Graves & Garton, 2017). The CAIE curriculum, especially through its O-level and A-level projects, is perceived for its emphasis on decisive reasoning, understanding, and relational abilities. These viewpoints are critical in dominating a language as complicated as English. The CAIE educational plan is intended to urge students to draw in the language effectively, upgrading their capacity to utilize English successfully in assorted settings (British Council, n.d.). Students who follow the CAIE curriculum exhibit higher proficiency in English than their matric counterparts. This is because of the reason that CAIE curriculum focuses on language immersion and content-based instruction. It helps students acquire language skills more naturally Graves and Garton (2017)

Raza and Coombe (2022) provide students with the perspective that the CAIE curriculum has proven to be a more interactive and engaging learning experience that can be beneficial for them in developing their English language skills. However, they face many challenges, such as higher costs and greater academic pressure. On the other hand, students in the Matric system often express frustration with the outdated teaching methods and the lack of opportunities for practical language use, which they believe hinders their language development and limits their future academic and career prospects (Raza & Coombe, 2022).

Ahmad and Ahmad (2024) suggest that students from a CAIE background can perform better in English language proficiency tests at the cost of accessibility because the cost of the CAIE system is very high and available in urban areas. The Matric framework, while more available, is frequently reprimanded for its obsolete showing strategies and restricted center around basic language abilities (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2024). Given the strengths and weaknesses of both curricula, there is a growing consensus on the need for reform. A potential arrangement could include incorporating the qualities of the two frameworks, consolidating the accessibility of the Matric framework with decisive reasoning, and completing the language abilities advanced by the CAIE educational program. This could make a more adjusted instructive structure that guarantees more extensive access and furnishes understudies with the abilities expected to prevail in a globalized world (Shamim, 2011; Manan et al., 2015).

One of the primary challenges encountered during the literature review was lack of sources for English language curriculum in Matric on the official website of Punjab textbook board. A significant challenge encountered was the limited availability of recent studies on English language curricula studied in Pakistan, which constrained the breadth of the review.

Research Methodology

To compare the effectiveness of Matric and CAIE curricula, the study used a quantitative method approach for its research to provide clarity on the differences in the students' perceptions regarding their respective curricula. The study administered a questionnaire to students from two institutions in Multan, Pakistan: Government Comprehensive Girls High School, representing the public school sector, and Beacon House School, representing the private school sector. The questionnaire was administered to a random sample of one hundred students from the two schools. The questionnaire was designed on the framework of Tyler's Rationale (1949). Tyler's Rationale was chosen for its conception of education essentially as experience, its approach to assessment as evaluation rather

than as measurement, and its approach to curriculum development as a problem-solving process in the development of curriculum and instruction.

The questionnaire was shared with the respondents through WhatsApp. Google Forms was used to design the questionnaire based on a Likert scale chart. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first section was based on reading skills. Section two was on writing skills. Section three was based on speaking skills, and section four was about listening skills. The last section, section five, was based on grammar and vocabulary skills. The first four sections, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, each had five questions, while the last section only had two questions. The questionnaire had a total of twenty-two questions, which were asked by the students to obtain their feedback. The questions were based on reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Hence, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are the variables in the study upon which a conclusion is drawn. Students' gender is not considered a variable in this study. The study only aims to find out which curriculum is more effective in helping students with their English reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills as language skills. The present study does not aim to compare any of the four skills.

Data Analysis

The feedback was obtained via a Likert scale chart. It was a three-scale Likert scale chart: agree, neutral, and disagree. Tables (tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) were drawn to compare the responses from both 10th Matric and 11th Cambridge students.

The study recorded a total of hundred responses from the students. Fifty responses were recorded from 10th Matric students studying at Government Comprehensive Girls High school, Multan, Pakistan and fifty responses from the 11th Cambridge students studying at Beacon house school, Multan, Pakistan.

Table 1

Name of the school

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Beaconhouse School, Multan	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
Valid	Govt Comprehensive Girls High School, Multan	50	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Both the Matric and O level students that were administered with the questionnaire were selected randomly using random sampling and all the students were in their final years of Matric and O level. The feedback data obtained was analyzed using SPSS for statistical analysis.

Table 2

Comparative Table of reading skills

Class	Do you believe your course helps you improve your reading comprehension skills?		Does your course provide strategies to help you tackle complex reading materials?		exp vario genre broado con	Does your course expose you to a variety of written genres and styles to broaden your reading comprehension abilities?			Does your course teach you effective reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, and summarizing?			Are you satisfied with the support your course provides for developing your reading skills?			
	D	Ν	Α	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А
10 th Matric	13	7	30	18	12	20	17	12	21	20	10	20	13	12	25
11 th Cambridge	1	6	43	3	12	35	6	13	31	3	8	39	2	10	38

The responses recorded from the first section are shown in Table 2. In Table 2, all the questions were based on the reading skills in which students' responses were recorded in the form of disagree (D), neutral (N), and agree (A). In response to the first question, which was related to the ability of the curriculum to improve reading comprehension skills, 30 students from the 10th Matric and 43 students from the 11th Cambridge agreed. In the neutral section, seven students from the 10th Matric and six from 11th Cambridge were neutral. In the disagreed portion, 13 students from the 10th matric and only one student from 11th Cambridge disagreed.

In the next question regarding strategies provided by their respective curriculum to enable them to handle complex reading material, 20 students from the 10th Matric and 35 students from the 11th Cambridge agreed. In question number three, regarding the ability of their curricula to provide exposure to different writing styles and genres to acclimatize the students with a variety of written text to increase their comprehension skills, 21 students from Matric and 31 from O level agreed. In question number four, students were asked if their course helps them develop effective reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and summarizing 20 students from Matric, whereas 39 students from O level agreed. The last question asked the students about their satisfaction with their reading skills, which was catered to by their respective curriculum, and 25 students from Matric and 38 from O level expressed positive satisfaction. The study reveals that in every question from the reading section, there were a greater number of agreed responses from O-level students. This shows that O-level students find their curriculum more effective regarding the development and improvement of their reading skills.

This concludes that the curriculum designed by CAIE is more effective in enhancing the reading skills of the students than the Matric curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education (M.O.E) Pakistan.

Table 3

comparative table of writing skills

Class	Do you believe your course helps you articulate your ideas clearly when writing?			Does your course teach you to structure your written work effectively?			Does your course help you develop effective writing skills?			Does your course encourage creative writing in your assignments?			Are you satisfied with the support your course provides for developing your writing skills?		
	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А
10 th Matric	17	6	27	17	10	23	18	9	23	21	10	19	16	15	19
11 th Cambridge	3	7	40	2	11	37	3	7	40	5	4	41	4	8	38

The next table (table 3) is based on section 2 in the questionnaire that focused on the writing skills of the students enhanced by their respective curriculum.

In response to the first question about the articulation of the ideas clearly while writing, 27 students from Matric and 40 students from O level agreed to the statement.

In the next question about the curriculum's ability to let the students help in structuring the written work effectively, 23 students from Matric and 37 students from O level agreed.

The third question was concerned with the development of effective writing skills to which 23 students from Matric and 40 students from O level agreed. The fourth question asked the students about the encouragement provided by their respective curriculum in creative writing to which 19 students from Matric and 41 students from O level agreed.

The last question asked about the satisfaction students have with their respective curriculum regarding the development of writing skills to which 19 students from Matric and 38 students from O level were satisfied.

This clearly shows that a higher number of students from O level were satisfied as compared to the matric students which again shows the effectiveness of CAIE in shaping writing skills of the students.

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Table 4

comparative table of speaking skills

Class	Do you find your course effective in confidently expressing yourself while speaking?		Does your course enhance your ability to organize your thoughts before speaking?			Does your course provide sufficient opportunities for practicing oral communication skills?			Does your course provide you with an environment where you can get better at talking?			Are you satisfied with the support your course provides for developing your speaking skills?			
	D	Ν	Α	D	Ν	Α	D	Ν	Α	D	Ν	Α	D	Ν	Α
10 th Matric	23	11	16	21	11	18	23	10	17	28	5	17	21	10	19
11 th Cambridge	10	17	23	6	7	37	18	9	23	9	10	31	10	14	26

Table 4 is based on section 3 in the questionnaire, which was based on the questions related to the speaking skills of the students provided by their respective curricula. Table 4 displays a comparison of the responses by Matric and O-level students.

In response to the first question about the effectiveness of their respective curriculum in expressing themselves confidently while speaking English, 16 students from Matric and 23 from O level agreed. Whereas 23 students from Matric and ten students from O level disagreed.

The statement of question number 2 was about the enhancement of their ability for organizing their thoughts before speaking to which 18 students from Matric and 37 students from O level agreed.

Third question was related to the opportunities provided by their respective curriculum for practicing oral communication skills to which 17 students from Matric agreed and 23 students from O level agreed, whereas, in the disagreed portion, 23 students from Matric and 18 students from O level disagreed with the statement. This shows that not many opportunities are provided by both curricula to help students develop oral communication skills.

The fourth question asked students if their curriculum provides them with the environment where their speaking skills can thrive, to which 17 students from Matric and 31 students from O level agreed.

Question five, the last question, asked the students about their satisfaction with their curriculum in providing them with support in developing their speaking skills. 19 students from Matric and 26 students from the O level agreed with the statement. Whereas 21 students from Matric and 10 students from O level disagreed. This shows that not many students felt satisfaction with their respective curriculum in providing them with support in developing their speaking skills, but still, the number of O-level students agreeing to the statements was greater than the Matric students.

Table 5

comparative table of listening skills

Class	Do you find your course effective in enhancing your listening skills?		Does your course offer sufficient opportunities for practicing active listening skills?		unde variou spe enc	Does your course facilitate understanding of various accents and speaking styles encountered in academic settings?			Does your course encourage active participation in listening exercises, such as note-taking and summarizing?			Are you satisfied with the support your course provides for developing your listening skills?			
	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А	D	Ν	А
10 th Matric	18	11	21	19	8	23	29	7	14	17	10	23	20	12	18
11 th Cambridge	10	6	34	9	14	27	16	10	24	8	7	35	8	12	30

Table 5 shows the comparison of responses from Matric and O level students regarding the development of the listening skills provided by their respective curriculum.

Question number 1 asked the students about the efficacy of the curriculum in enhancing the listening skills of the students, to which 21 students from Matric and 34 students from O level agreed. In the second question, respondents were asked if their curriculum provides them the opportunity to practice active listening skills, to which 23 from Matric and 27 students from the O level agreed. The third question asked the students about their curriculum, facilitating their students in providing them with the understanding of different accents and speaking styles, to which 14 students from matric and 24 from O level agreed. Meanwhile, 29 students from the matric and 16 students from the O level disagreed with the statement.

Question number four asked the students about making students participate in listening exercises like note taking and summarizing to which 23 students from Matric agreed and 35 students from O level agreed.

The last question, question number five, asked students about their satisfaction with their curriculum in providing them with support in improving their listening skills, to which 18 students from Matric and 30 students from O level agreed. Whereas 20 students from Matric and eight students from O level disagreed with the statement. This shows that a higher number of students from the O level found their curriculum supportive in providing them with sufficient help in enabling them to better their listening skills, whereas 20 students from Matric found their course insufficient regarding the improvement of their listening skills.

Table 6

comparative table of vocabulary and grammar

Class		ed with the supp developing you knowledge?		Are you satisfied with the support your course provides for developing your grammar accuracy?					
	D	N	Α	D	N	А			
10 th Matric	12	11	27	11	6	33			
11 th Cambridge	5	9	36	3	6	41			

The last two questions in the questionnaire belonged to section 5 which were related to the vocabulary and grammar skills provided by the curricula. Table 6shows us the comparison of the responses from both matric and O level students regarding the last two questions.

The first question in section 5 asked the students if they felt satisfied with their curriculum in providing them with support for developing their grammar knowledge, to which 27 students from Matric agreed, and 36 students from the O level agreed to the statement. The next question was related to the satisfaction of the students with their curriculum in providing them with support in developing their grammar accuracy, to which 33 students from Matric and 41 students from O level agreed. We can see that students who believe that their course provided sufficient support in developing their grammar accuracy skills were higher among O-level students than Matric students.

Overall, the study reveals that in all the questions number of O level students who responded positively about their curriculum's effectiveness in developing their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and vocabulary and grammar skills was higher than the Matric students. Whereas the number of disagreed responses was higher among Matric students as compared to O level students.

Discussion

The objective of our research is to determine the effectiveness of both Matric and CAIE English curricula in Pakistan from the perception of students who are currently studying these curricula.

For that, the research randomly selected the students from the Government Comprehensive Girls High School and Beacon house School in Multan, Pakistan studying in class 10th Matric and 11th Cambridge respectively,

and administered them with an online questionnaire based on Tyler's Rationale (1949) to record their responses regarding their respective curriculum.

While designing the questionnaire, the present research covered all four English language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). The research also added vocabulary knowledge and grammar accuracy skills. The study examined that the ratio of O-level students who showed satisfaction with their curriculum in supplying them with effective learning techniques was higher than that of the Matric students.

This shows that the Matric curriculum for the English language is not sufficient for developing reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

Both curricula provide students with activities and exercises by the end of the chapters to increase their knowledge and understanding of the English language. These exercises also aim to improve students' proficiency in English. From the number of positive and negative responses from Matric and O-level students, the Matric curriculum is not providing the best help in providing effective exercises and creative activities. According to Malik et al. (2020), Matriculation is based on a product-oriented approach with a norm-referencing style and is purely objective in its nature of evaluation. Skills are incorporated discretely. Hence, the curriculum objectives are not met with the evaluation criteria, and students ultimately suffer in their ability to perform better as learners of the English language.

Whereas CAIE encourages the students to read widely, both for their own enjoyment and to further their awareness of the ways in which English can be used. This caters to not only the learning of English as a language but also the pragmatic approach through which students can practically implement the language in context (Malik et al., <u>2020</u>). This is evident in the results of the study that O-level students expressed their satisfaction with their curriculum with a great lead in several positive responses compared to the responses from Matric students.

Conclusion

The critical focus point of this research is the stark contrast in effectiveness between the Matric and CAIE English curricula. Students concentrating on the CAIE curriculum reported a surer encounter and more prominent improvement in their English language abilities than those studying Matric. This highlights the qualities of the CAIE curriculum in giving balanced training that fulfills worldwide guidelines and equips students with the fundamental abilities to prevail in a globalized world.

The present research concludes that the Matric curriculum for the English language requires improvements to foster students' English language skills successfully. According to students studying the Matric English curriculum, the Matric curriculum fails to provide effective reading strategies, creative writing skills, confidence in English speaking, and understanding of various accents and speaking styles encountered in academic settings. These are the areas where most of the students expressed their dissatisfaction with the Matric English curriculum.

Conversely, the research reveals that the CAIE curriculum for English language learning is more successful in fulfilling students' requirements for gaining English language skills. The feedback from the students demonstrates a more significant level of fulfillment with the curriculum given by the Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) for their O-level students. This curriculum's approach is viewed as more comprehensive and better suited to foster essential English language competencies, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Future research works based on the effectiveness of pedagogical techniques in implementing the learning objectives mentioned in the Matric and CAIE curricula can be carried out. This research will help fellow learners understand how we can develop a curriculum that helps students actively enhance and polish their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills along with their vocabulary knowledge and grammar accuracy skills.

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