

# Bridging the Gap: Improving English Literacy of Junior High School Students at PPA Hope Generation

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## Abstract

The application of a community-based English literacy intervention for junior high school pupils at PPA Hope Generation in Medan is investigated in this study. The program included interactive teaching techniques, culturally appropriate narrative and descriptive texts, and basic technology-assisted tools with the goal of addressing English literacy gaps among disadvantaged students. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, the study tracked 20 students' development over the course of eight planned sessions that concentrated on vocabulary enrichment and reading comprehension. The results show notable gains in students' motivation for independent study, vocabulary knowledge, and interaction with English literature. A student-centered, interesting, and encouraging learning environment was created through the effective fusion of interactive read-aloud strategies with easily available digital materials. These findings demonstrate the possibility of low-cost, high-impact literacy programs in informal learning environments and offer useful advice to educators, community workers, and legislators who are dedicated to enhancing English literacy among Indonesia's underprivileged young.

**Keywords:** *English literacy, junior high school, descriptive text, narrative text, interactive read-aloud, community-based intervention, vocabulary development, non-formal education, Indonesia.*

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## Introduction

The foundation of education is literacy competency, which enables pupils to succeed academically and take an active role in society. English literacy abilities are particularly important at the junior high school level in Indonesia in order to provide a solid basis for future educational possibilities and lifetime learning. However, a number of issues—such as a lack of reading materials, inadequate training for teachers, socioeconomic inequality, and ubiquitous technology distractions—continue to impede the nation's literacy progress. With more than 700 regional languages, Indonesia's enormous linguistic diversity makes it even more difficult to implement reliable and efficient literacy programs across the country.

In order to increase junior high school pupils' English literacy, especially in underprivileged neighborhoods, these challenges necessitate thoughtful, context-sensitive interventions. Research emphasizes how important it is to evaluate present reading levels, pinpoint internal and external literacy-affecting elements, and put into practice efficient teaching techniques that can close existing gaps. [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Apart from these systemic problems, students' unique difficulties comprehending English texts also require attention. For example, research conducted in Medan shows that students' poor vocabulary, poor command of grammar, and lack of interest in reading English texts all contribute to their difficulties with reading comprehension. These challenges are made worse by teacher-related problems, such as poor teaching strategies, as well as outside variables, such as a lack of English-language resources and unsupportive home settings.

These difficulties are demonstrated at PPA Hope Generation by the students' poor comprehension and production of English narrative and descriptive texts, which are crucial for the development of both factual and creative reading skills. Many junior high school students have not had enough exposure to reading English-language materials, which leads to poor understanding and a lack of confidence when it comes to putting down their thoughts. Targeted teaching tactics that incorporate interesting materials, efficient reading techniques, and ongoing practice catered to each student's needs are necessary to close these gaps.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how junior high school students at PPA Hope Generation may enhance their English literacy in descriptive and narrative texts. This will help them write better, improve their reading comprehension, and eventually close the literacy gap.

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## Literature Review

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English are all components of literacy in English language instruction. According to Anderson and Freebody (1981), literacy is crucial for both social interaction and academic performance because it encompasses more than just technical reading abilities; it also includes the capacity to create meaning and employ language correctly in a variety of circumstances.

According to Ganierohani, Deliana, and Rangkuti (2019), there are three main reasons why Medan high school pupils struggle with reading comprehension:

1. Problems pertaining to students, like poor grammar proficiency, a little vocabulary, and low motivation;
2. Issues pertaining to teachers, such as unorganized instruction and inefficient teaching techniques; and
3. External issues, such as unsupportive learning surroundings and a dearth of English reading materials.

Their results highlight that difficulties with reading comprehension are caused by pedagogical approaches and contextual constraints in addition to individual student proficiency. These problems are also seen at PPA Hope Generation, where students frequently display a limited vocabulary and lack confidence when reading in English.

Setianingsih (2017) found three important elements influencing junior high school pupils' English reading literacy, which supports these findings:

1. Input, refers to the amount and frequency of exposure to English texts;
2. Vocabulary knowledge that demonstrates pupils' command of the language; and
3. The connection between input and literacy results is mediated by learning desire. Her research showed that reading skills are directly improved by regular exposure to English texts and targeted vocabulary training, while the relationship between the two is reinforced by motivation. These results are consistent with observations made at PPA Hope Generation, where students show appreciable gains in reading comprehension when given more opportunities for interactive learning and text interaction.

In the meantime, Putri (2022) investigated how well the Interactive Read Aloud (IRA) approach promoted English literacy in secondary school pupils. The IRA method blends guided student participation through questioning, explanation, prediction, and reflective discussion with expressive teacher-led reading. According to Putri's research, IRA greatly enhances students' reading comprehension, vocabulary development, critical thinking, and classroom engagement—especially for those with weak English proficiency. According to fieldwork at PPA Hope Generation, using read-aloud strategies has been shown to be successful in keeping students' interest, arousing their curiosity, and promoting the active usage of new words, particularly in small groups.

Our involvement with PPA Hope Generation, a community-based learning facility for disadvantaged Medan students, emphasizes how important contextualized interventions are to fostering English literacy. Many students don't have access to English-language resources at home, and classroom settings frequently don't support the development of reading skills. We carried out an intervention using service-learning exercises that included three essential elements:

1. Accessible materials by offering engaging, grade-appropriate English texts accompanied by visual aids;
2. Guided reading assistance via vocabulary talks, read-alouds, and reflection exercises; and
3. Student-centered encouragement, which gives students the chance to choose subjects and use creative expression to convey what they have learned (e.g., drawing, storytelling, or roleplay). By encouraging participation, boosting self-esteem, and enhancing understanding of descriptive and narrative texts, these tactics meet the particular requirements of PPA students while also being consistent with theoretical frameworks from earlier research.

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## Methodology

Through a community-based intervention, this study used a qualitative descriptive design with an action-oriented viewpoint to help junior high school students at PPA Hope Generation become more English literate in descriptive and narrative texts. Based on the needs of the pupils as seen and pertinent research on literacy development techniques, the design was created.

In keeping with Ganierohani, Deliana, and Rangkuti's (2019) focus on the contextual nature of

reading comprehension difficulties, the qualitative technique was selected to capture the complexity of students' actions, perceptions, and difficulties in learning English. The researchers were able to make nuanced interpretations of students' motivation, progress, and reactions to instructional tactics by watching them in a natural learning setting.

## Participants and Environment

Twenty junior high school students in Medan, North Sumatra, enrolled in PPA Hope Generation (Grades 7–9) participated. Most of the pupils were from low-income families, and they had little access to resources in English and outside assistance.

Beyond the confines of formal education, the community-based, non-formal setting provided a special chance to address literacy issues. The findings of Setianingsih (2017) about the significance of regular exposure and vocabulary intake for reading literacy, especially for pupils with little exposure to English at home, are in line with this.

## Method of Intervention

Putri's (2022) Interactive Read Aloud (IRA) technique was incorporated into the student-centered, interactive design of the intervention. The researcher-facilitator led children through prediction, questioning, clarification, and reflective discussion while reading age- and culturally appropriate English descriptive and narrative texts in eight weekly sessions.

The sessions included student-led storytelling motivated by the readings, picture-word association exercises, and guided vocabulary reviews to strengthen vocabulary acquisition and understanding. In order to strengthen connections with the texts and promote involvement, the materials were thoughtfully created to be straightforward, visually appealing, and contextually meaningful.

## Technology Use to Promote Literacy

Simple digital aids, including as flashcards, story audio recordings, and brief YouTube videos, were offered to complement print materials. To encourage participation, particularly for children who struggle with decoding or have short attention spans, these resources were accessed through readily available mobile devices. Students were able to engage with stories collaboratively and reflect contemporary reading practices thanks to technology, which served as both an educational assistance and a motivational tool.

## Data Collection Methods

Data were gathered through multiple methods to ensure triangulation:

1. **Observational Field Notes** – Documented student engagement, participation, and challenges during sessions.
2. **Student Learning Journals** – Allowed students to reflect on their understanding, interests, and difficulties after each session.
3. **Pre- and Post-Test Tasks** – Assessed vocabulary knowledge and comprehension before and after the intervention.
4. **Semi-Structured Interviews** – Conducted with selected students and the program coordinator to explore perceptions of progress and learning conditions.

## Data Analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis was used to examine the data. To find recurrent patterns like vocabulary increase, shifts in comprehension techniques, and interest levels, observational notes and journal entries were categorized. The results of the pre- and post-tests supported the changes that were seen, which helped to corroborate the qualitative findings. Setianingsih (2017), who stressed the need of word intake, and Ganierohani et al. (2019), who emphasized the importance of direct observation in comprehending literacy issues, both support this analytical approach.

## Combining Community Engagement with Integration

In keeping with the idea of community service (pengabdian kepada masyarakat), the methodology supported students' emotional and academic needs while also facilitating research. Weekly meetings served as empowerment exercises that boosted students' self-esteem, motivation, and trust. This method demonstrates how literacy research can be applied practically in low-resource, real-world educational settings.

Even while the results might not be entirely generalizable, they still provide insightful information and a possible template for such community-based English literacy initiatives throughout Indonesia.

## Findings

The English literacy development program's implementation at PPA Hope Generation produced a number of important conclusions about the kids' proficiency with narrative and descriptive texts:

### 1. Improved Vocabulary Acquisition and Application

The students' command of the English language vocabulary showed a noticeable improvement. Many students had trouble identifying or using simple descriptive and narrative terminology prior to the intervention, which limited their ability to understand and communicate. More than 75% of students demonstrated notable improvements in their ability to remember and use new terms correctly in both written and spoken contexts after eight weeks of interactive reading and guided vocabulary exercises. This result emphasizes how crucial active practice and frequent, contextualized exposure are for vocabulary growth, especially for students who have had little exposure to English before.

### 2. Increased Student Motivation and Reading Engagement

Students' motivation to interact with English-language literature increased noticeably as a result of the training. A more dynamic learning environment was created through the use of culturally appropriate stories, interactive read-aloud sessions, and chances for questioning and prediction. Pupils showed greater levels of engagement, asked questions, and showed interest in the specifics of the stories—actions that are rarely observed at the beginning of the program. During interviews and journal reflections, a number of students stated that reading was

pleasurable to them for the first time, demonstrating a positive change in their perspectives on learning English.

### 3. Effective Integration of Simple Technology

The incorporation of fundamental digital resources, such as audio narrations, visual slides, and brief video stories, offered multimodal assistance that strengthened understanding of narrative and descriptive texts. Students with lower starting reading levels benefited most from these resources, which enabled them to make the connection between written words and sounds and images. The development of self-directed learning habits was unexpectedly indicated by the fact that some students started independently reviewing digital materials outside of class, frequently using family mobile devices. This result demonstrates how easy-to-use technology can promote increased student autonomy in low-resource environments and extend learning outside of the classroom.

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## Discussion

The results of this study show significant advances in our knowledge of how junior high school children in low-resource environments build their English literacy, especially when it comes to descriptive and narrative texts.

Setianingsih (2017) asserts that vocabulary knowledge and the frequency of English input are important determinants in literacy accomplishment, and the notable improvement in students' vocabulary learning and application supports this claim. The intervention helped kids internalize and utilize new terms in meaningful ways by exposing them to age-appropriate literature on a regular basis and using interactive read-aloud techniques to reinforce important vocabulary. This bolsters the idea that for students with little prior experience, repetition and contextualized instruction are crucial to developing core literacy abilities.

Second, Ganierohani et al. (2019), who identified poor interest and motivation as the main impediments to reading comprehension, are addressed by the observed increase in student motivation and engagement. A nurturing learning atmosphere that encouraged inquiry and excitement was produced through the use of relatable, culturally relevant literature, engaging conversations, and student-centered activities. This shows that when given interesting, cooperative, and emotionally supportive training, even students from underprivileged backgrounds can grow to have a positive attitude toward learning English.

Third, the successful integration of basic digital tools—like short movies, visual slides, and audio stories—showcases their potential as useful aids for the development of literacy, particularly for children with low starting competency. This result is in line with Yusri and Ardi's (2021) study on the beneficial effects of contextually appropriate digital resources on literacy abilities. As students reviewed the materials at home, digital media not only improved comprehension but also promoted autonomous, self-directed learning, underscoring the potential of reasonably priced technology to expand learning opportunities outside of scheduled class times.

When taken as a whole, these results highlight how crucial interactive, multimodal, and contextually relevant training is to closing the literacy gap among underprivileged junior high

school students. The findings from PPA Hope Generation indicate that careful pedagogical approaches, regular practice, and a focus on cultural relevance and student engagement are more effective ways to improve literacy outcomes than expensive resources or high-end technology.

The limited sample size and the brief eight-week intervention period are two of the study's drawbacks, though, and they limit how broadly the results can be applied. Furthermore, the study did not evaluate vocabulary retention over the long term or the long-term impacts on academic performance, which restricts our understanding of how long the effects of the intervention will last.

In order to improve literacy support, future research should examine how to modify and scale comparable treatments across various community contexts, maybe enlisting the help of parents or community volunteers. Deeper understanding of successful literacy development tactics in informal educational settings may also be obtained by examining gender-based differences in learning preferences or the effects of different storytelling genres on motivation and comprehension.

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## Conclusion

Through a community-based intervention centered on descriptive and narrative texts, this study aimed to improve the English literacy abilities of junior high school students at PPA Hope Generation. The results show that when accompanied by interactive teaching techniques and culturally appropriate materials, students had significant improvements in vocabulary mastery, reading engagement, and comprehension despite having few resources.

Increased student confidence, engagement, and autonomy in learning English was facilitated by the incorporation of technology-assisted content, guided vocabulary exercises, and interactive read-aloud sessions. These findings support the efficacy of using student-centered, research-based strategies in community literacy programs, especially for students who have had little exposure to English before.

Crucially, the study emphasizes that closing the literacy gap entails more than just providing educational materials; it also entails creating a welcoming, accommodating, and stimulating learning environment that encourages motivation and continued engagement. The experience of PPA Hope Generation serves as an example of how non-formal education programs can significantly influence students' literacy development if they are carefully planned and carried out.

Despite the study's short length and small sample size, it provides insightful information for educators, volunteers, and legislators looking to increase English literacy among underserved adolescents. The English literacy gap among Indonesian students might be significantly reduced by expanding such interventions with longer-term programs, broader community involvement, and alignment with formal schooling.

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