

Improving English Skills of Mountain Communities in Bandar Meriah Village, Karo District

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Abstract

The foundation for developing this Community Partnership Program (PKM) is the significance of soft skills for the younger generation. Increasing interest in learning English in mountain communities through environmental/natural folklore books and strengthening the soft skills of Karang Taruna partners in Bandar Meriah Village, Munte District, Karo Regency are the main goals of this service project. This PKM's specific goals are to boost enthusiasm for studying and advance English language proficiency (soft skills). In order to find knowledge and supporting technologies, the Community Partnership Program (PKM) uses a variety of tactics, including discussion and question-and-answer sessions. When learning English and developing a theoretical understanding of the language, the lecture technique is employed. The outcomes of community service training demonstrate that teaching English to students through nature-themed picture books makes the language easier for them to understand. Students' progress is fairly good while employing this strategy. In addition, it was shown that teens and children acquired English learning materials more quickly, and that this activity served as a springboard for more activities.

Keywords:

soft skills, picture book, english

Introduction

One of a person's fundamental necessities is education. From elementary school to university education, the Indonesian people are taught a wide range of subjects. Nonetheless, there are occasionally flaws in the actual learning process. The infrastructure and amenities that are currently in place in locations that are very remote from the capital demonstrate this. Students who attend school in rural locations receive different amenities and infrastructure than those who attend school in large cities. youngsters who receive their education in metropolitan

regions typically have a different level of knowledge than youngsters who reside in more rural places. As they get to college, this disparity will show much more.

It's critical to acknowledge how quickly technology is evolving at the moment. Technological advancements have an impact on several aspects as well. Education is among the most impacted things. One of the greatest philosophers of all time, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, from Germany, likewise emphasized the value of learning various languages when he said, "Those who know nothing about foreign languages, they know nothing about their own". The implication in Wolfgang's statement above is that it's critical to acquire proficiency in a language other than your home tongue. In light of this and the state of technological advancement, proficiency in foreign languages is also necessary. English is among the most significant foreign languages spoken worldwide. The most widely spoken language in the world, this one is a lingua franca (Akhiar et al., 2017). You will therefore have more chances to compete for a better life in the future if you speak English fluently.

In essence, communication courses are connected to language learning. The spoken or written lessons in the field of education are then connected to this communication lesson. Language has many purposes as a communication tool, which are subsequently illustrated in a number of significant settings. The primary goal of oral communication is to enable the listener to comprehend the speaker's cultural background. The quick advancement of technology and how it affects many aspects of life (Sari & Wahyudin, 2019). For this reason, knowledge needs to be shared not just in schools but also in communities where there is a lack of access to quality education. It is impossible to dispute the advantages and practicality of knowledge, particularly when it comes to English knowledge, which has transformed the way a variety of tasks are carried out in practically every aspect of life. The growth of the tourism industry, which is seeing an increase in demand from international visitors, provides one indicator of how essential English is in daily life. The speed at which technology is developing today greatly affects the environmental harm that takes place on Earth. Humans have made several inventions with the intention of improving their quality of life (Awada, 2016). But the materials—trees, rocks, and water—that they utilized to create this creation were found in nature. The utilization of these basic materials results in pollution, which puts the environment of the planet in jeopardy. This implies that our environment gets more harmful as our ingenuity advances.

English has been introduced to children at an early age as one of the required topics. However, one of the drawbacks that contributes to this subject's declining popularity is the use of various teaching methods. To get around this, one strategy is to create teaching strategies that combine in-class and out-of-class instruction. Practicing learning in natural settings, such fields or rice paddies, is one example of this approach.

Many strategies have been employed to improve English language learners' learning styles. One of them is putting the idea of English Day into practice. In this instance, there's a designated period for participants to communicate in English. Teachers and staff at the Karo Integrated Senior High School can benefit from organizing English Day. The duration of this activity was around a month (Kaur et al., 2016). By utilizing the English Day concept, the outcomes of this service activity can raise participants' enthusiasm in learning. Additionally, there is a second way to increase reading proficiency: intensive reading (IR) and extensive reading (ER). IR can be understood as an approach to reading that considers the preferences of the reader. Thus, the reading material that is assigned to them needs to take into account their preferences and areas of interest. In the meantime, ER is described as a reading strategy that takes the reader's skill level into consideration. Language skills are referred to as ability, and the content that is offered needs to be rated appropriately to track the language progress of the learner. Two approaches were used in a number of earlier studies, including Muchtar and Ali (2017), to enhance pupils' reading abilities. These two techniques are called IR and ER. The

purpose of this research is to boost students' creativity in learning and serve as a further resource for lecturers teaching English, particularly in the area of reading.

Media is one of the factors that significantly affects students' learning patterns during the educational process. The internet is one of the media used in the English language learning process. There are many parties who have used the internet as a media; is one among them. He uses the internet as a teaching tool for English in his work because he believes it can help students practice authentic communication (Kubota, 2016). This is consistent with the notion that computers can facilitate English language learning as well. Meylina is the one who completed this task. Based on the outcomes of the exercises, techniques such as these are also highly successful in helping students get over their learning boredom.

The community service activities were held in Bandar Meriah Village because, based on observations, the school's teaching strategies still employ antiquated techniques. The same is true for primary school English classes. They frequently become bored and impatient with the constant teaching that takes place in the classroom. Upon observation, it becomes clear that the lovely natural surroundings can enhance learning and leave a lasting, energizing effect on children (Kasih et al., 2022). The group selected this site after taking these factors into account. At the moment, the government does not view English language instruction for elementary school students as entirely necessary. If learning strategies are investigated further, they can actually aid children in raising their level of awareness regarding the significance of preserving the environment at an early age. Humans must understand that in order to keep up with the advancement of time, human talents must also change. However, it's also critical to always keep in mind how to avoid risky situations.

Children's linguistic abilities will also be enhanced by this teaching strategy, which will be very helpful in the long run. Sadly, it appears that society's widespread presumption that learning English will cause people to lose touch with their own tongue and culture is impeding progress (Prayuda, 2023). Children's awareness of their surroundings will decline if this is the guiding principle for whether or not English is relevant to them. Naturally, they won't acquire the soft skills that will benefit them in the future (Ali & Watson, 2018). One way to encourage children to learn English is to take them to this village's Karang Taruna. Karang Taruna is a venue or gathering place for the local population, particularly the youth. With the intention of promoting and developing human resources as well as profitable economic ventures that make use of the region's natural resources, the community directly founded this organization (Prayuda & Tarigan, 2024). Elementary school is another setting where this type of instruction might be initiated after that. In order to improve the interest and soft skills of the residents of Bandar Meriah Village, this service activity offers two platforms for the development of English learning strategies.

Children won't have many difficulties when learning English through methods and approaches that are based on nature. The primary goal of this education is to strengthen children's bond with nature and raise their consciousness of the value of preserving it as their present and future home. "The bond between children and the environment arises generally because John Locke believed in the existence of "real nature" in children," according to a quote from Lensik-Oberstein. This indicates that there is, in fact, an innate relationship between kids and their surroundings. This is because the kids themselves are authentic and pure, which is actually the quality that makes these kinds of English learning approaches so ideal.

As stated in the description above, the goal of this service project is to help partner villages' residents become more fluent in English. This volunteer program results in a type of instruction to improve vocabulary and everyday discourse. The decision to teach daily conversation was made because it was seen to be necessary for the youth of Karang Taruna. The service team does this in the aim of using these talents in the workplace in the future.

dissemination in scholarly publications, dissemination on electronic media, and video documentation of activities are the intended outputs from this activity.

Methodology

This exercise employs a service-learning methodology. John Dewey introduced several methods of implementation, including this one. He claims that this kind of approach might lead to a learning process if students actively create meaning through supervised real-world experiences. They will be able to hone their critical thinking skills via introspection through this approach. In addition, people can fulfil their social obligations by making contributions to society. This community service project is executed in multiple thoughtful phases. The intention is for this program to function as intended. the phases are socialization, training, mentorship, and evaluation. This stage was selected because it is the most appropriate to be put into practice, according to the findings of the observations that were made (Prayuda et al., 2023).

English language instruction is the main focus of this service activity's execution strategy. This training exercise is conducted in a few different ways. This approach was selected because it was thought to be appropriate for completing this task. These techniques include: (a) Question and answer sessions and group discussions. The former helps encourage critical thinking in participants, while the latter helps participants gain a deeper understanding of the subjects being studied. The participants' general perceptions of local folklore were one of the subjects covered. (a) Lectures and discussions: This style of instruction is employed for imparting theoretical knowledge and an awareness of the English language. (c) Demonstration: This technique translates folklore about the environment and natural world to teach and practice English. (d) Simulation: This technique demonstrates the usefulness of the English language that has been used as well as the outcomes of storybook media.

Youth organizations and primary school students worked together to carry out this project. This project was completed in around eight months. The steps involved in carrying out this activity are preparation, training, evaluation and monitoring and evaluation, post-test, pre-test (particularly for Karang Taruna partners), and activity output preparation. Each meeting includes materials aimed at helping partners become more proficient in the English language.

Findings and Discussion

The goal of this community service project is to develop the soft skills of the partners, which are youth organizations and elementary school children. Teaching primary school pupils, the fundamentals of English is the first issue that needs to be resolved, followed by the provision of resources to youth organizations. The training approach is based on Van Els' theory, according to which a good teacher is one who can use his expertise in the field of language directly.

Based on the findings of identifying issues that partners encounter, the service team can provide partners the following solutions:

- a. Gather the materials needed to do community service projects. Lecturers and students from connected study programs have developed these materials. Naturally, the abilities of each teacher are taken into consideration while selecting the service team. The answer provided in the form of resources might help partners see teaching from fresh angles. In

addition, during this action later on, partners and slaves might share knowledge and information. Thus, this activity can be advantageous to both sides.

- b. In addition to providing partners with activities aimed at enhancing their English language proficiency, the service staff makes time to engage in social interactions and impart the money-related entrepreneurial values that are the cornerstone of Universitas Negeri Medan.

The several-week-long events were implemented without a hitch. Students in primary schools were the initial target of the inaugural activities. The emphasis is on teaching English through picture books that are centered on nature. The students' excitement is really admirable. When they spotted the entourage of the service team holding picture books that would be used, they appeared very excited. The team decided to start with elementary school pupils since they offered greater flexibility in terms of time and location. Of course, choosing the appropriate class is the first task for the service staff. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade kids were the first to be chosen from the designated classrooms (Matsuda, 2017). Because the students in these three classes were deemed old enough and had studied English, they were utilized as objects. As a result, in comparison to other courses, they can absorb more quickly.

Word class divisions and basic vocabulary are introduced at the start of the first exercise. The group utilized PowerPoint as the medium for this exercise, and the visuals in the presentation represented the various components of speech. The classes of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, and interjections are the first in the introduction to word classes. (Interjection). Naturally, the team selected terms that symbolized themes associated with nature. For instance, the word "tree" is selected for the noun. Next, the word I (I) is selected for pronouns. The verb "plant" is selected for it. Select the word "yard" for the adverb. The statement "I planted a tree in my yard" is created by combining all of these terms. This statement demonstrates how young learners are taught basic vocabulary, which they then use to construct sentences. This is obviously connected to teaching strategies that draw inspiration from nature.

The next step in the learning process is to give them laptops with picture books or other visual materials to enjoy. Children were introduced to basic vocabulary (vocabulary) with a nature theme throughout this lesson. Presenting the tale illustrations to the pupils on the laptop is the first stage. Subsequently, the group assisted the pupils in labelling the objects they observed in the picture book. The team then assists in guiding children who are having trouble speaking to express what they observe. Everything they observe has to do with maintaining a clean environment. Following the activities, a school tour was extended to the students. This exercise is completed in the latter stages of the program (Sun et al., 2017). Students will play games as part of this activity's schedule. The plant guessing game is one of the games that are played. One pupil attempts to predict the plant that the trainer has specified to start the game. Students will then be asked to guess the name of the identified plant. This name guessing is, of course, done in English. In addition to asking participants to guess the photo, the trainer describes the purpose of each plant and the rationale behind plant preservation.

A photo of the plant is also included to further illustrate the function. The picture displays text that symbolize how plants work. For instance, in the lesson "Mango," pupils will see an image of a mango fruit, a picture of a boy, and the phrases "use vitamin C to boost immunity." In addition, pictures of mango fruit that has been processed, including cakes and juice, are displayed. Students appear highly excited about studying when they are shown and explained in this way, and their ennui can be conquered. Making youngsters aware of their surroundings is a tried-and-true approach to teaching them English so they may comprehend it more thoroughly. Thus, there are two benefits to using this strategy.

The first is educating them in English, and the second is acclimating them to new surroundings. Aside from that, employing a technique like this will prevent them from getting bored fast.

Aside from that, youngsters were taught in a somewhat different way in the subsequent activity, which included youth organizations as participants. When it comes to youth organizations, the presenters first assess the participants' aptitudes. It's just an ordinary discussion exam in the beginning. This test was administered successfully since it was evident from the results that the students' skills were adequate to begin instruction right away.

The conversation test was selected not only as a direct indicator of aptitude but also as a means of acquainting oneself with the youth. One of the questions in this discussion test is, "What is your hobby?" Where are you employed? Which food is your favourite? Where are you employed? When do you typically arrive at work? and how do you feel about this particular program? Approximately ten sessions were used for youth organization activities. Youth organizations focus more emphasis on training students how to talk, compose application letters in English, and read materials about protecting the environment. Cooperative learning is the approach employed when it comes to speaking. This approach to learning places a strong emphasis on how engaged students are in the process (Richards, 2017).

Approximately ten sessions were used for youth organization activities. Youth organizations focus more emphasis on training students how to talk, compose application letters in English, and read materials about protecting the environment. Cooperative learning is the approach employed when it comes to speaking. This approach to learning places a strong emphasis on how engaged students are in the process. The cooperative learning approach was selected since it was thought to be highly appropriate for this particular course. Using this approach, participants will be able to collaborate to find answers to the questions. Additionally, participants that get along well can collaborate and form study groups. Naturally, the participants will be much more excited in learning with such interactions.

This approach is also used while teaching writing and reading. Engaging in reading is not a passive activity; it requires active participation. It is up to the readers to piece together the intended meaning. The content is presented as a picture book with instructions on how to prevent floods and grow trees. As a result, some of the young people started a tree-planting campaign as a means of becoming refreshed. An interview test was administered as part of the pre-test to ascertain the participants' ability during the first meeting. The service team conducted the initial interview exam. Following that, a set of questions was sent to the participants, and they conducted interviews with each other. This is done in order to link up participants with quite good test results with those with slightly poor test results. This is carried out in compliance with cooperative learning principles. To allow participants to improvise, this test is administered at random. As mentioned before, a pre- and post-test was only given to the young group. Table 1 displays the pre-test results for the individuals.

Excellent outcomes were obtained from the pre-test activities in this activity. The average score that was received ranged from 64.3, the lowest, to 73. This could be taken to suggest that the Karang Taruna group's ability to speak English can still be enhanced to a very high level. This is due to the fact that no one had a worse score on the pre-test. Remember that there is an evaluation phase to this exercise. Exercises or a test of some kind are given during this assessment phase to measure how well the students have absorbed the information. Exercises consisting of writing and conversation are used for evaluation. Evaluation is another area where discussion is used as a practice. Process evaluation is one of the evaluation techniques that will be used in this PKM exercise. The implementing team in this evaluation conducted a training procedure to enhance English language proficiency. The implementation team will use this procedure to pinpoint any roadblocks that crop up during the activity. Participants, training procedures, and instructional materials are some of these challenges.

Regarding instructional resources, the materials utilized are those that the service team has created using the DK book English for Everyone: Level 1. This book was selected since it is rather comprehensive and has resources that relate to the lesson's topic for the activity. The participants' learning results and time efficiency during this service procedure provide insight into the training process. Finally, the presence and sincerity of the participants in the training process are what are supposed to be understood as participants.

And now for the second assessment, which is the last assessment. The assessment completed at the conclusion of this service activity is the final evaluation. The accomplishment of the activity's goals, the participants' degree of content comprehension, and opinions on the training activity's sustainability are all included in this evaluation. The results of the final assessment demonstrated how well the participants could use every day talk. Through the post-test final interviews, the service staff is able to observe this evolution. Table 2 displays the post-test results following the service activity procedure. It is still classified as Good based on the post-test data that were acquired. On the post-test, 70.3 was the lowest average score and 75 was the highest. As evidenced by the 3% rise, this result demonstrated progress that might be considered rather significant when compared to the pre-test. This graph demonstrates that development occurs both before and after learning. One person received a score of 64.3 for the lowest score and 73 for the highest.

The key to carrying out this activity is to highlight a few successes that come from the social initiatives. It is anticipated that the soft skills of English, one of the foreign languages, will help the children and young people in this hamlet become more proficient. This is due to the fact that one factor that can boost society's competitiveness in the technological age is linguistic proficiency. The following are the outcomes of the PKM activity: 1) English-speaking youth and children; 2) English-language environmental/natural folklore books; and 3) Skilled Human Resources. The capacity and willingness to learn more from the participants is another outcome of this kind of training. This is consistent with the findings that indicate participants' increasing enthusiasm in learning English, as evidenced by their active question-asking behaviour. Improvements in the material distribution procedure can also be facilitated by a lovely environment.

Conclusion

From the preceding discussion, it can be inferred that engaging in activities aimed at piquing participants' interest in learning English in this field is highly beneficial. due to the fact that kids and teenagers have a lot of opportunities and can learn the things that are imparted effectively. Their excitement for the learning process and the emergence of further beneficial actions following this service activity are indications of this. The theory used in this service activity can yield the desired outcomes. This is evident by the rise in a number of participants' skill scores. Several participants saw increases that were rather considerable, even if this figure did not leap too high. It was determined that the elementary school and youth levels of the materials given to the participants were suitable. This is also predicated on the outcomes that the individuals attained.

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