

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND QUALITY OF ENGLISH EDUCATION AT SDN 047169 IN REGAJI VILLAGE, MEREK DISTRICT, KARO REGENCY, NORTH SUMATRA PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores efforts to improve English learning access and quality at SDN 047169 in Regaji Village, Merek District, Karo Regency, where limited exposure to English, dominance of the local language, and inadequate facilities hinder students' vocabulary and motivation. Using a qualitative descriptive method within a community service (PEMA) program, data were gathered through observation, documentation, and interviews with two key participants-the school principal and a second-grade teacher-selected purposively. Analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model with triangulation for validity. Findings reveal increased student enthusiasm, participation, and vocabulary mastery through interactive, contextual methods supported by strong collaboration with school staff, suggesting that participatory and culturally relevant approaches can effectively enhance rural primary English education.

Keywords: Community Service, English Education, Rural School, Qualitative Research, Vocabulary Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Regaji Village, located in Merek District, Karo Regency, has great potential for the development of basic education. However, the village faces challenges, particularly the strong use of local language in students' daily communication, which limits their understanding of formal Indonesian. This situation affects their ability to learn English, as they lack a strong foundation in language skills. Based on initial observations, many students at SDN 047169 still struggle to recognize letters correctly, understand basic vocabulary, or construct simple English sentences. The lack of supporting learning facilities and the limited focus on English instruction at school further hinder students' language development.

As part of a Community Service initiative, students from the English Education Study Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU), divided into 12 groups, carried out a program to address these issues. The activities included English tutoring, direct classroom teaching, educational games, and interactive learning assistance. This program not only aimed to improve students' English skills but also to raise awareness among the community about the importance of quality education. In its implementation, students held various activities such as tutoring (Bimbel), direct teaching in class, educational games that carry the concept of English Fun Learning, vocabulary introduction through songs and movements, and ice-breaking sessions to build intimacy between teachers and students. In line with research according to Santrock's (2007:313), which states that children learn foreign languages faster than adults. Other studies also state that mastering a foreign language from an early age has good benefits for student

development (Mustafa, 2007). Through the introduction and learning of English in elementary school and equivalent, students will know and understand English from an early age, even in completely different contexts, although limited, of course, according to their level and maturity.

The limited time allocated for learning English in elementary schools, which is only conducted as an extracurricular activity, results in students receiving insufficient exposure to the language. Teaching English from an early age is considered an important point in the development of a child's foreign language skills because early childhood is regarded as a golden period in which children can easily learn various things, including English. According to Sukarno (2008), English learning must therefore be effective and able to motivate them.

English learning for young children (elementary school students) is very different from that of adults. Mulyati states that children live in a world of play; they prefer learning through play. Children also have a different level of concentration compared to adult learners, as they can easily lose interest and motivation. They tend to be more active when learning activities are conducted in an enjoyable manner rather than being limited to static and monotonous tasks (Anggrarini, 2019). Early learners are categorized as children aged 0 to 8 years, including those of elementary school age, who still prefer learning through play. Learning through play has many benefits for children, including the development of their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills (Mulyati, 2019).

This is what inspired Group 8 students of UINSU to design a one-week Community Service (PEMA) program in the village. Choosing enjoyable learning activities is the right solution for young learners, where learning activities should be fun and engaging for the students. The activities designed for the children should therefore be carried out in an enjoyable way. These activities are also expected to broaden their knowledge of English and vocabulary. In this case, SDN 047169 in Regaji Village is considered to meet the criteria as a school suitable for such activities (tutoring), including direct teaching in class, educational games that incorporate the concept of English Fun Learning, vocabulary introduction through songs, movement, and ice-breaking sessions. This is based on the condition of the students at SDN 047169 in Regaji Village, who are in need of an English teacher to help them become more familiar with and improve their English knowledge.

This program is designed to help improve the quality of basic education in Regaji Village, particularly in English language skills. Through these activities, students are not only engaging in community service but also shaping themselves into future educators who are academically competent, socially aware, and able to communicate and adapt to diverse environments.

The hope is that this initiative will serve as an early step toward positive change in the village, especially in developing children's interest and ability in learning English. Using fun and interactive approaches, children are introduced to English as a window to the world.

At the same time, students' direct involvement with the community strengthens the role of higher education as an agent of change. They learn not only to teach, but to be present, to listen, and to make a real impact. From here, the spirit of transformation begins—through small steps that can lead to greater change in the future.

The gap between urban and rural educational access remains a persistent issue in Indonesia. While urban schools are equipped with better resources and infrastructure, rural schools often lack qualified English teachers, modern teaching aids, and exposure to engaging instructional strategies. Studies by Saputri & Sukarno (2024) and Risnawati et

al. (2022) highlight these disparities, noting that rural students have fewer opportunities to engage with English meaningfully.

Based on these concerns, Group 8 of the Community Service Program (PEMA) from the English Education Department at UINSU designed and implemented a one-week program targeting students of SDN 047169 in Regaji Village. The program focused on fun and participatory learning methods to introduce basic English vocabulary and develop student motivation. By applying child-centered strategies such as songs, games, and visual aids, the program aimed to foster both cognitive and emotional engagement.

This initiative aligns with educational psychology research, such as Santrock (2007), which emphasizes that children absorb foreign languages more effectively at an early age. Furthermore, the concept of learning through play, as suggested by Mulyati (2019), supports the use of interactive and enjoyable activities for young learners. This study attempts to fill the gap in rural English education interventions by offering a replicable model grounded in participatory and contextual learning.

An interview with the Grade 2 homeroom teacher at Regaji Village Elementary School provided additional insights into the dynamics of student behavior during the community service program. The interview was attended by three teachers, including the Grade 2 homeroom teacher.

When the student teacher asked whether the students had been difficult to manage during lessons prior to the program, the homeroom teacher explained that he had only been assigned to the class for two days before the university team began teaching. Therefore, he could not give a comprehensive assessment of the students' prior behavior.

Nevertheless, the homeroom teacher observed that the students showed great enthusiasm toward the presence of the university students. They often expressed their excitement through physical gestures such as hugging the teachers, which occasionally made it harder to maintain order in the classroom. This enthusiasm reflects positive emotional engagement but also presents challenges in keeping the class focused and organized.

This finding aligns with Pianta (2016), who notes that young children tend to respond to new experiences with heightened emotional expression and a desire for physical closeness to their teachers. The homeroom teacher also emphasized that the student teachers were welcome to report any cases of uncontrolled behavior directly to him, reflecting positive collaboration between regular school staff and guest instructors. This is consistent with Johnson & Johnson (2019), who argue that clear communication and mutual support between school teachers and guest educators are essential for smooth teaching and learning processes.

In conclusion, the interview suggests that the students' enthusiastic and affectionate response toward the teaching team serves as a valuable asset in fostering learning engagement. However, it also requires adaptive classroom management strategies to ensure a conducive learning environment. Collaboration between the university students and the homeroom teacher plays a key role in addressing these challenges. The success of educational programs in rural areas depends not only on the quality of teaching materials and methods but also on the quality of interactions and relationships between students, educators, and the school community as a whole.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach integrated within a community service (PEMA) framework Location of Community Service (PEMA) on English tutoring

for elementary school children is in Regaji Village, Merek Subdistrict, Karo Regency, North Sumatra Province. The community service program involves 35 elementary school students from grades 3 to 6 who reside in Regaji Village. The English tutoring sessions are held four times a week, with each session lasting 90 minutes. The community service partners are the Regaji Village Office and the Merek Subdistrict Office. The total duration of the English tutoring program is one week. The tools and materials needed for the community service activity include a classroom/tutoring space, whiteboard, markers, eraser, and textbooks/modules. The methods used in the implementation of this community service on English tutoring for elementary school children are socialization, training, and guidance.

Data were collected through:

1. Observation: Monitoring student participation, enthusiasm, and responses during activities.
2. Interviews: Informal discussions with teachers and students to assess the program's relevance.
3. Documentation: Collection of photos, daily reports, and lesson activity logs.

Data Analysis Technique:

The data analysis followed the qualitative model of Miles & Huberman, including:

1. Data Reduction: Filtering relevant information from observations, interviews, and documentation.
2. Data Display: Organizing the findings into categories such as learning outcomes, challenges, and participation levels.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Interpreting the results to derive meaningful insights and ensure data credibility.

Triangulation:

To enhance the validity of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing observations, interviews, and documentation results.

This method ensured that the analysis reflected both the learners' experiences and the facilitators' reflections, providing a holistic understanding of the program's impact.

1. The socialization method is carried out as an initial step to introduce and approach the elementary school children.
2. The training method is used to help the students learn to recognize, pronounce, and write basic English.
3. The guidance method is intended to direct and train students in understanding basic English.

The English tutoring program for elementary school children is guided by two English tutors. Through this tutoring program, the expected outcomes are that the children will become familiar with basic English from an early age, enabling them to adjust more easily to higher levels of education, and they will be able to practice saying basic English words and sentences related to daily life.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Community Service Program (PEMA) conducted by students of the English Education Department, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU), at SDN 047169 Regaji Village, Merek District, provided a significant contribution in improving the quality of English language education in rural areas. The outcomes and discussions from the implementation of this program are as follows:

1. Increased Participation and Student Enthusiasm

Throughout the activity, a significant increase in student participation was observed. The students showed strong enthusiasm in learning English through fun learning methods, such as educational games, English songs, vocabulary cards, and English rhymes.

According to Slavin (2006), enjoyable and interactive learning activities can enhance students' intrinsic motivation. This is also supported by Hamzah B. Uno (2011), who emphasizes that learning motivation improves when instructional delivery is engaging and actively involves students.



Picture 1 and Picture 2 Students of SDN 047169 REGAJI are having fun learning vocabularies and song together with games.



Picture 3 Students of SDN 047169 are practicing vocabulary cards in English.

2. Effectiveness of Contextual and Interactive Methods

The use of visual aids such as flashcards, image-based materials, and conversation simulations proved effective in helping students understand and retain basic English vocabulary and structures. The contextual approach made it easier for learners to relate the content to their daily experiences.

As explained by Sanaky (2013), Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) allows students to grasp concepts more meaningfully when linked to real-life situations. Additionally, Arsyad (2014) noted that visual media accelerates comprehension and supports long-term memory retention.



Picture 4,5,6 Students of SDN 047169 improve students' understanding of vocabulary and basic English structures.

3. Non-Formal Activities Supporting the Learning Process

Besides formal classroom learning, students were also involved in non-formal activities, including private tutoring sessions after school, religious gatherings (Qur'an recitation and Islamic studies), and community service (gotong royong). These activities fostered a positive environment and built emotional bonds between the students, the facilitators, and the local community.

Sugiyo & Hartati (2008) assert that community-based education strengthens the relationship between educators and learners, creating a holistic educational experience that goes beyond cognitive development to include social and emotional growth.



Picture 7 Inviting students to private lessons after school to better master the learning material.



Picture 8 PEMA members are working together for the Annual Party in REGAJI VILLAGE



Picture 9 After the Maghrib prayer, they recite the Quran together in the mosque.

4. Collaboration with School Personnel and Community Leaders

The success of the program was supported by active collaboration with teachers at SDN 047169 and local community leaders. They were instrumental in facilitating the implementation of educational and social activities, and their involvement enhanced program sustainability.

According to Sari & Wahyuni (2019), the success of community-based educational programs greatly depends on the quality of social interaction and the level of engagement between program facilitators and the target population. Strong social relationships increase community participation and ensure long-term impact.



Picture 10 Confirming PEMA members to the SDN 047169 Regaji Merek school and taking photos with the teachers.



Picture 11 Conducting a flag ceremony every Monday.

5. Development of Students' Professional and Social Competence

This program served as a practical platform for students to develop pedagogical skills, communication abilities, leadership qualities, and social empathy. They learned to manage classes, adapt teaching strategies to diverse learners, and engage with a community setting.

As emphasized by Wulandari, Prasetyo, & Utami (2022), participation in community service enables education students to strengthen their professional competencies, especially in teaching practice, social collaboration, and understanding student characteristics.



Picture 12 Students of SDN 047169 are collaborating to learn English well.

6. Challenges and Solutions

Several challenges emerged during the program, including limited school facilities, insufficient teaching aids, and a wide range of student academic abilities. These issues were addressed by applying flexible teaching methods, group-based learning, and creative use of simple media.

Noble & Heale (2019) highlight that field-based adaptation and continuous reflection are crucial elements of naturalistic and participatory approaches in community-based educational initiatives.



Picture 13 and Picture 14 Learning English in a simple way.

The ability to adapt to these challenges in the field supports the naturalistic and flexible model of qualitative community research, as noted by Noble & Heale (2019).

CONCLUSION

The PEMA program in Desa Regaji demonstrated that interactive, contextual, and community-based vocabulary teaching significantly enhances language acquisition, pronunciation, and student motivation in rural elementary schools. The key to success lies in stakeholder collaboration—students, teachers, parents, and community leaders. The use of practical, engaging, and culturally sensitive materials allowed students to feel more connected to the learning process and encouraged active participation.

This model of English vocabulary learning—grounded in local relevance and cultural integration—offers a replicable strategy for rural areas where traditional methods have proven ineffective. The combination of visual media, religious values, and playful learning tools facilitated deeper engagement and lasting outcomes. The holistic and inclusive approach ensured that even students with no prior exposure to English could make measurable progress within a short time.

The program's success was also due to its adaptability and responsiveness to daily feedback, ensuring instructional practices met the dynamic needs of learners. Furthermore, embedding learning in both formal and informal spaces allowed students to practice consistently across environments, enhancing retention and fluency. To ensure sustainability, future initiatives should prioritize teacher training, material development tailored to rural settings, and institutional support for ongoing community-academic partnerships. This experience affirms that transformative education in rural Indonesia is possible through inclusive, empathetic, and culturally grounded interventions.

The PEMA program at SDN 047169 Regaji Village successfully improved students' basic English vocabulary and learning motivation through fun, interactive, and contextual approaches. The program's success was driven by strong community collaboration,

adaptive learning strategies, and integration of both formal and informal educational spaces.

This study confirms that introducing English to young learners in rural areas is both feasible and impactful when supported by participatory, culturally sensitive, and practical teaching methods. The triangulation of data and qualitative analysis ensures the credibility of these findings.

Future programs are encouraged to include sustained teacher training, locally adapted materials, and broader community engagement to ensure long-term impact. The experience gained through this program also contributed to the professional growth of student facilitators, preparing them to be educators who are responsive, empathetic, and community-oriented.

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