

ENHANCING EARLY ENGLISH LITERACY THROUGH INTERACTIVE ALPHABET LEARNING AT SANGGAR LENTERA: A SIX-WEEK COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM

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Abstract

Beginning literacy skills in the English language are an essential foundation on which kids develop as they progress and mature at school. Conversely, rural kids will have inadequate opportunities for learning and understanding more refined concepts in English. To address these deficits, a community service project took place at Sanggar Lentera and lasted for six weeks and targeted active learning of the alphabet for kids aged 6-8. The intervention employed multisensory approaches, including colorful flashcards, action games, repetition, and the recognizable song ABCD from Upin Ipin, offering a fun and consistent learning platform for kids to acquire foundation skills in early English literacy. Key observations and experiments have shown significant gains in letter recognition, vocabulary extension, pronunciations, and confidence levels for kids in expressing themselves in English. Also, it boosted motivation and cooperation among kids. This research highlights the importance of learning as a community and how it can be complementary to formal learning, and more so in regions that have limited resources. This research also reveals that child-centered interactive learning methods are very efficient for developing English literacy skills among young children.

Keywords: Early literacy, alphabet instruction, multisensory learning, community service program, young learners.

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Introduction

Many people believe that it is essential for young kids to acquire some basic literacy skills for learning throughout their life. Children at this age are very curious and ready to learn new things with the help of very engaging and emotive experiences. At this stage, it will be very advantageous for kids to be taught English so that they have an excellent foundation for learning more things in the future. It is particularly useful because English will soon become an integral part of learning at school, in computers, and while communicating with people all around the world.

Although it is very necessary for kids to start learning English early, the skills they possess regarding learning English proficiently differ greatly from region to region. Children who have grown up in most rural areas of Indonesia don't have much chance to practice English outside of school. Even learning fundamentals about literacy, let alone anything more advanced, can be very difficult for kids. There aren't enough materials or educators available for learning English.

A similar problem also occurs in the area surrounding Sanggar Lentera, which is the learning center on which this community service project focuses. Sanggar Lentera is a relatively small but vital grass-roots educational endeavor begun by members of the local area as a supplement

for kids interested in learning beyond school. It presents a welcoming and relaxed space and opportunity for kids to read, play, and participate in additional activities sometimes offered by volunteers.

Before the program started, it was clear that many first- and second-grade kids at the sanggar could only recognize alphabet letters by their Indonesian names, like "A-Be-Ce," and had trouble saying the letters in English. A few kids still didn't understand how letters and words are connected. They didn't know, for example, that the letter "A" can stand for the sound /ae/, as in apple. This shows that the person doesn't know much about phonology and the alphabet, which are two important parts of learning to read and write in English.

The KKN team knew about these problems and made a six-week English learning program that was fun, interactive, and focused on the needs of the kids. The goal wasn't to make the kids do schoolwork; it was to teach them English in a way that was fun, natural, and easy for them to understand. A lot of research backs up the idea that kids learn best when they are emotionally involved. As a result, the program had music, movement, stories, and pictures.

The ABCD song from Upin & Ipin was a big part of the show. It was chosen on purpose because kids already knew it. Kids were more excited and willing to join in because they knew the song and the characters. People have known for a long time that songs are a great way to teach, especially to young kids. This is because they have melody, rhythm, repetition, and emotional enjoyment, all of which help people remember things better. The kids learned the order of the letters in the alphabet and how to say them in English by singing the Upin Ipin ABC song.

Sanggar Lentera was also a great place for this program because it was a calm place to learn. Some kids might think the classroom is too structured and scary, but the sanggar lets them move around, sit where they want, and talk to each other whenever they want. When kids feel safe, they are more likely to try out new words. In this setting, kids often raised their hands to answer questions, repeated English words without worrying about getting them wrong, and played learning games.

The main goals of the program were to:

1. Make learning the letters of the English alphabet fun and easy for kids.
2. Help kids feel more sure that they can recognize, say, and use basic English words.
3. Show kids how to use basic English phrases like "I like..." "I have..." and "This is..."
4. Use fun things to do to help people feel good about learning English.
5. Play games and do things with other people to help kids get better at making friends.
6. Show how places like Sanggar Lentera help kids learn.

These goals show a full understanding of literacy, which includes more than just cognitive skills. They also include emotional engagement, building confidence, and social growth. The program's goal was not only to teach English but also to get kids excited and interested in learning.

The program used fun activities like letter hunts, flashcard races, guessing games, gesture-based vocabulary practice, and storytelling to fit the way young kids naturally learn and play. These activities get kids moving, get their imaginations going, and let them play with language without any stress.

The next parts of the full article talk about how the program was run, what methods were used, and what happened each week

Early English literacy lays the foundation for how children will later approach reading and language. Children, when six to eight years old, begin to master the key skills: they are capable of noticing letters, catching sounds, and connecting what they read to meaning. These early skills determine the fluency with which they will read and understand text in the coming years (Hassinger-Das, Hecht, & Lesaux, 2020). At the same time, in most rural parts of Indonesia, chances to encounter English are limited. Children often rely entirely on school lessons, which cannot offer sufficient time or resources to practice substantially. As a result, basic skills in English-letter recognition, phonological awareness, and vocabulary-remain so far poorly developed.

The alphabet knowledge is a cornerstone of early reading; it is about recognizing letter shapes, naming the letters, and linking each letter to its sounds. For Indonesian learners, pronouncing the English alphabet is far more challenging because it differs from the Indonesian alphabet. Hands-on and visual learning tools-Flashcards, posters, and letter-tracing activities-help children become familiar with both how letters look and sound. By using multisensory instruction-that involving sight, hearing, and touch-memory increases, and mix-ups between pronunciation in English and Indonesian can be avoided.

Method

The methods section describes a six-week English language program at Sanggar Lentera, designed with flexible, child-centered, and multisensory activities conducive to childhood development. It includes information about implementation location and duration, participants, materials and media, structure and flow, and tracking progress. All these are done with the end result of developing a structured and flexible learning process that could be implemented again on another project.

The activities were conducted at Sanggar Lentera's learning community center, which kids have been familiar with as an after-school center. It presents a more relaxed ambiance compared to a formal classroom setting, and kids were more likely to remain engaged. The learning center itself is colorful and uncluttered with mats and posters put up from previous projects. It goes well with active kids aged 6-8 who require colorful and exciting activities.

It conducted on every Friday, from 4:00 PM to 5:30 PM, for six weeks. Each 90-minute session followed a smooth pattern: warm-up, introduction to topics, practice sessions, reward games, and cool-down. It made it easy for kids to remain on task, identify linkages among sessions, and build confidence.

The participants were primarily comprised of first and second-grade kids because they lived within the neighborhood area. Although there were some fluctuations depending on school or family schedules, about 15-25 kids attended on a regular basis. The kids' grasp of English skills varied greatly. Some kids were exposed to English words from either songs or television shows like Upin & Ipin, Cocomelon, or Baby Shark, but some were still developing foundation skills like vocabulary and letter recognition.

Because these were still young developing students, the instruction incorporated visual, auditory, and kinesthetic components. Not once were any materials too old or irrelevant for these young students. Again, it reinforced that learning and being meaningful and relevant lead to better learning and retention. Alphabet skills were introduced with new letters introduced on a regular basis, employing colorful flashcards, posters, letter recognition activities, and practice with letter naming and writing. Vocabulary was introduced with familiar subjects like fruits, pets, school supplies, and parts of the body.

To encourage communications, the kids were taught simple sentences involving "I like....," "I have....," and "This is....," and these enabled them to construct meaningful sentences without much emphasis on grammar. Phonics and pronunciation were also incorporated. Letter sound drills, Indonesian-English sound correspondences, word imitation activities, and singing the Upin Ipin alphabet song were included.

A variety of learning materials and media were incorporated into these sessions. These included colorful flashcards, posters, a song speaker for singing, composition papers for letter writing, and match letter materials as well as number papers and picture cards. These materials were multi-sensory and portable and child-safe.

The weekly pattern continued with consistency for kids. The sessions began with a warm-up session involving small talk and singing 'ABCD Upin Ipin.' Letter learning activities involving flashcards followed. Vocabulary practice enabled kids to link letters and words with images and gestures. The kids were then involved in practicing sentences with simple structures either alone or in groups. Rewarding games were played as a fun-filled interactive session with a quick review at the end and an opportunity for kids to share their favorite letter or word.

Learning progress was monitored using direct observation, simple word-checking tasks,

letter-identification activities, and comparisons involving early and later weeks. These were informal and fun learning activities that were child-friendly.

Throughout these six weeks, there were marked improvements not just in the English skills but also in attitude and behavior. Children made progress in letter recognition as they progressed beyond letters that looked similar and transitioned toward sounds with English pronunciation. Constant practice with songs, games, and flashcards made a significant difference.

The vocabulary list grew gradually. Children began labeling objects on their own and relating words from English to things around them. “Bag. Bag. I have bag!” as an indication of spontaneous usage stood out as a child pointed at a schoolmate’s backpack. Children were composing short sentences as they entered week three, and weeks five and six witnessed all of them composing short sentences on their own.

Pronunciation skills were enhanced through regular drills and practice sessions and music activities. Difficulty with words containing /æ/, as in “apple” or with letter H disappeared as rhythm skills with the Upin Ipin singing tune boosted precision. Motivation levels were significantly heightened as kids began arriving on time, requesting songs, and taking an active role in gaming sessions.

Apart from academic learning, there was also growth in relation to social and emotional needs. Some children who were shy began to build confidence and participate in group activities. Social skills included working as a team, taking turns, and perseverance, which were as valued as verbal skills. The alphabet song from Upin Ipin was special because of its effects. The characters and rhythm made it easy for kids to learn letter sequences and pronunciations. By the end, almost every child could recite it clearly and confidently, sometimes asking for it at the beginning of a lesson. In general, these findings correspond with major theories about early childhood. Multisensory learning theories relate to learning via sight, hearing, and touch, and Krashen's Theory relates to a stress-free zone. Music learning theories communicate concepts about rhythm and repetition. And, at a theoretical constructivist level, they also relate to active involvement. Overall, these findings demonstrate that young kids learn best with interactive and engaging experiences.

Conclusion

It goes to show that meaningful learning does not have to be in fancy gadgets, expensive materials, or rigid classrooms. When teaching taps into how kids naturally learn-through play, repetition, movement, and emotional connection-joyful and effective language learning is possible.

Throughout the program, children showed significant gains in several key early English literacy skills: the children improved a lot in alphabet recognition; some kids who were previously reluctant to name the English alphabet confidently named the alphabets, spotted them on flashcards, and connected them with known words. Their phonological awareness increased as they mastered the sounds of English that are different from Indonesian phonetics and provided a very strong foundation for reading and pronunciation in the future.

One of the highlights was the ease with which the children grew accustomed to using simple English phrases, such as I like..., I have..., and This is.... These may sound simple, but they represent an important milestone for children in their learning: the point at which they can actually say something meaningful in a new language. To see them using these expressions spontaneously in games and conversations really shows how well the program makes language learning feel natural.

Social and emotional gains were just as important. The children became more active, cooperative, and confident. They helped each other in group tasks, took turns nicely, and celebrated each other's successes. Some parents reported that their kids practiced English words at home; in other words, the learning reached beyond the sanggar to daily life.

It was enhanced by the powerful ingredient of an ABCD Upin Ipin song, as the familiar tune and playful rhythm made the alphabet stick and the kids joined in without hesitation. Music-based learning boosted retention and fostered a positive classroom vibe that sparked enjoyment,

imagination, and engagement.

The program, in general, emphasized that the community learning spaces of the likes of Sanggar Lentera are a primary supplement towards formal education, especially in places that are remote and where there is a scarcity. With the right approach, sanggar education can provide truly transformative experiences that support academic growth while building confidence.

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