Empowering Non-English Teachers: Implementing English for Fun in Pantai Tinjau Village

Amelia Faddya Wildhani[1], Diah Safithri Armin[2], Annisa Nur Azizah[3], Tiara Fadiyah Rambe[4], Raihani[5], Melani[6], Ahmad Ridho Khuailid[7], Muhammad Akbar Rizky[8], Asti Ananta[9], Veriyansah[10]

[1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10] Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia
Email: ameliafaddya@gmail.com[1], diahsafithriarmin@uinsu.ac.id[2], annisarusli2612@gmail.com[3], tiarafdyh24@gmail.com[4], raihanihani93@gmail.com[5], kyomelani@gmail.com[6], khuailidridho@gmail.com [7], ajokakbar@gmail.com[8], asti8387@gmail.com[9], veriyansah112@gmail.com[10]

Abstract

This study aims to introduce English and empower non-English teachers at SD Negeri Pantai Tinjau, a rural school without formal English lessons. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the program was implemented over three days with participatory and applicative methods. Activities included basic English introduction for grades 1–3 through nursery rhymes, a creative workshop for grades 4–6 to produce Classroom Expression Posters, and teacher training on using Vocabulary Wall and Classroom Expression Posters. The findings showed that students were enthusiastic and more willing to use simple English expressions, while teachers reported increased confidence in integrating English vocabulary into their lessons. The results indicate that simple, low-cost, and participatory media can effectively foster English exposure in rural schools and support teacher readiness, making it a viable model for replication in similar contexts.

Keywords: *Teacher Empowerment, Rural Education, Visual Learning Media, Early Exposure*

INTRODUCTION

English education plays a crucial role in preparing young people to face global challenges, especially in the digital era that demands the ability to communicate between languages. As an internationally spoken language, English is a key tool in various fields such as education, business, and technology. However, the implementation of English language learning in rural areas still faces significant obstacles, both in terms of teaching staff, teaching methods used, and access to learning media (Hossain, 2016).

Based on the EF English Proficiency Index (2024) report, Indonesia is ranked 80 out of 116 countries with a score of 468, categorized as "low" and a 5-point drop from the previous year. Indonesia's position at the Asian level is 12 out of 23 countries, below the global average score (477). By region, provinces in Sumatra, including Aceh, recorded an average score of 462, which is lower than provinces in Java (492) and major cities such as Surabaya (539) and Jakarta (523). This data indicates a significant gap between urban and rural areas in terms of English proficiency, which is largely influenced by limited access to education and language teaching resources.

One concrete example of this condition is found in Pantai Tinjau Village, Sekerak District, Aceh Tamiang Regency. Based on the initial observation of the community service team, at SD Negeri Pantai Tinjau there are no English subjects or specialized English teachers. The English learning process is very limited and has not been able to attract

students' interest. The existing general teacher did not have the skills to teach English, had never attended specialized training, and did not have visual-interactive teaching media (Savignon, 2003).

Experience in various regions shows that early introduction to English can build stronger communication skills in the future. The use of songs, educational games, and the creation of teaching media (vocabulary wall and classroom expressions) are expected to make it easier for students to understand the basics of English (Pateşan et al., 2018). Currently, there is no organized effort to assist general subject teachers in incorporating English vocabulary and expressions into the classroom learning process.

Therefore, this Community Service activity raises the theme "Development of English Teaching Human Resources and Language Artifact Capacity" through the implementation of the *English for Fun* program. The program is designed not only to improve students' skills, but also to equip general teachers with practical strategies to incorporate simple English vocabulary and expressions into daily learning. According to Yuliani et al. (2023), interactive and engaging vocabulary learning can significantly enhance students' mastery and interest in learning English. This article aims to describe the process and results of the implementation of the *English for Fun* program as a first step in building sustainable English exposure in primary schools without English teachers.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to describe the process of implementing activities in a real and detailed manner according to the conditions in the field (Creswell, 2014). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring and describing educational activities based on direct experience, especially in the context of empowering teachers and students in elementary schools that do not have formal English teaching. All activities were conducted through observation, documentation, and recording of the team's experiences and reflections during the program (Assingkily, 2021; Miles et al., 2014).

This activity was carried out in one of the SD Negeri Pantai Tinjau for three days. The program was designed with the main focus on introducing English to students and teachers, given the unavailability of English teachers at the school. Therefore, each activity was structured in stages to build the participants' basic understanding and familiarity with English, both through direct activities with students and training for teachers.

On the first day, the team provided basic English instruction to students in grades one to three. As the students had never had English lessons before, the approach used was fun and communicative. The materials taught focused on recognizing the alphabet and numbers in English, delivered through nursery rhymes and direct pronunciation. The songs used are designed to help students recognize letter sounds phonetically and memorize number sequences through rhythm and repetition (Rahman et al., 2024). This activity takes place in the classroom, with students invited to sing and follow movements as a form of visual and auditory memory reinforcement. The service team actively guided students' pronunciation and enunciation individually and in groups to ensure equal understanding and participation. In this session, the teacher was not directly involved as the main focus was on the students as the initial recipients of the basic English introduction (Nasution & Karimaliana, 2024).

The second day of activities was aimed at students in grades four to six, with the approach emphasizing more creative and participatory activities. The team brought various pieces of classroom expressions in English, such as simple instructions commonly used in the learning environment, complete with picture illustrations. These pieces were used in the classroom expression poster-making activity. The students were invited in groups to paste the expressions onto large styrofoam media that had been provided. This process not only develops reading skills and recognizes the meaning of expressions, but also builds a sense of belonging to the learning media they create themselves. Each time the students pasted the expression, they were asked to read it aloud and repeat the pronunciation with the service team (Sari & Gushendra, 2020). The finished posters were then installed in the classroom as visual learning aids that are expected to continue to be utilized in daily learning. Teachers were not directly involved in this session, but the resulting media was designed to be easily used by teachers in giving instructions or stimulating the use of English on a regular basis.

On the third day, the activities focused on empowering teachers through presentation sessions and training on the use of learning media in the form of word wall vocabulary. The team had previously prepared this word wall media, which contains a list of English vocabulary grouped by themes such as colors, fruits, numbers, and everyday objects. The vocabulary is not accompanied by pictures, but only text in a large size that is easy to read and installed on the classroom wall. In this session, the team invited classroom teachers to attend and introduced the benefits and how to use the word wall vocabulary directly. The importance of visually exposing English vocabulary in the classroom, even if formal instruction is not yet available, was explained. The team showed how this media can be utilized by teachers in various learning contexts without having to teach English specifically. For example, teachers can point to or mention certain words when discussing relevant topics, so that students become familiar with English terms in routine activities (Zaen et al., 2022).

In addition to explaining the benefits, the team also provided a brief simulation on how to incorporate the vocabulary into the learning process. Interactive discussions with teachers were also conducted so that they could convey their constraints and needs in starting the integration of basic English in their respective classrooms. Through this approach, the program is expected to foster teachers' confidence to start using English on a simple and contextual scale (Kakerissa, 2021).

The whole series of activities not only aims to increase students' awareness of English, but also opens up opportunities for non-English teachers to play an active role in the process of introducing the language. By synergizing creative learning for students and teacher empowerment through applicable media, this program tries to present an initial solution to the limited resources for teaching English in village primary schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Limited English Exposure and Teaching Capacity in Rural Context

Based on observations at SD Negeri Pantai Tinjau, it is known that English language lessons are not yet part of the official curriculum, and there are no educators who have an educational background in this field. In addition, the teachers had never attended training related to English pedagogy and did not have basic tools such as learning posters, vocabulary cards, or supporting interactive media. This situation reflects a common problem in rural Indonesian schools, where general teachers are often given the responsibility of

teaching English despite not having adequate preparation, professional training or access to the necessary learning media.

According to research by Fadilah et al. (2023), rural areas face various obstacles in learning English, such as limited facilities, lack of teaching materials, and unavailability of professional training for teachers. At SD Negeri Pantai Tinjau, these constraints mean that learners hardly receive systematic English language teaching. The absence of visual media and a structured curriculum has also led to a decline in students' enthusiasm for learning and limited opportunities for vocabulary enrichment.

Positive Response and Engagement from Students and Teachers

During the *English for Fun* program, both students and teachers showed great enthusiasm for the learning approaches and tools used. For students in grades 1 to 3, learning was introduced through nursery rhymes and interactive singing sessions to teach the English alphabet and numbers phonetically. These activities are synchronized with body movements to strengthen memory through audio and visual stimulation. This communicative and fun method successfully attracts students who have never learned English before, encouraging them to actively participate in the activities and follow instructions.

For students in grades 4 to 6, this workshop program encourages a more innovative and collaborative approach to learning. Students in groups create *Classroom Expression Posters* of simple English phrases decorated with illustrations. They attach the phrases to a large poster, then read them aloud and repeat them with their group mates. This activity encourages active engagement and builds a sense of ownership of their work, which is then displayed in the classroom for ongoing use. Students' enthusiasm was evident as they interacted with the colorful learning media and images, supporting Tiurmina (2018) findings that the use of visual media can increase engagement and effectiveness of collaboration-based learning.

From the teachers' side, although they were not directly involved in all student sessions, they still appreciated the practical benefits of the learning media that had been created. Media such as Posters and Vocabulary Wall are considered simple to make, cost-effective, and can be used repeatedly. This finding is in line with Surwantini (2016) study which confirms that visual media is superior to conventional methods in increasing students' enthusiasm for learning.

Empowering Generalist Teachers through Practical Strategies

On the third day, program activities focused on teacher capacity building. They were introduced to the *Vocabulary Wall*, which is a collection of English vocabulary based on themes such as colors, fruits, numbers, and common everyday objects printed in a large format for easy viewing and understanding.

In the implementation stage, the community service team demonstrated how to use English vocabulary contextually in non-English lessons. For example, teachers can refer to the word "apple" when explaining the topic of fruit in science subjects. In addition, teachers are also trained to use simple classroom expressions such as "Sit Down, Please", "Listen Carefully", and "Raise Your Hand" so that English can be inserted naturally in the daily learning process.

The training also had a positive impact on teachers' confidence. They claimed to be more confident in using English expressions in the classroom. Many stated that this was the first experience of attending a training that emphasized hands-on practice and the use of media. This result is in line with Kolb (2015) *experiential learning* principle which emphasizes that direct experience can strengthen skills and confidence.

Impact on the Learning Atmosphere

The integration of interactive activities and visual media noticeably changes the learning atmosphere in the classroom. Students become more curious, focused and willing to participate in English-related activities. The colorful visual media and students' own work make them more eager to learn and repeat English vocabulary without feeling overwhelmed.

Addressing the Rural–Urban English Proficiency Gap

The conditions at SD Negeri Pantai Tinjau reflect the EF EPI 2024 data which ranks Indonesia 80th out of 116 countries with a score of 468, below the global average of 477. Provinces in Sumatra, including Aceh, are among the lowest achieving regions. This rural-urban divide is largely due to differences in access to educational resources, teacher training and language exposure (Nugraheni et al., 2023). Although implemented on a limited scale, the *English for Fun* program successfully demonstrated that a community-based approach can be an effective starting point in creating sustainable exposure to English in rural schools. In addition, the program also encourages the empowerment of non-English teachers to play an active role as facilitators in language learning in their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the *English for Fun* program at SD Negeri Pantai Tinjau proves that the use of simple, affordable, and participatory learning media can be an effective solution for introducing English to students in rural areas that do not yet have English language subjects or specialized English teachers. The combination of interactive activities such as singing children's songs, making posters, and creating vocabulary walls with teacher training sessions has increased student participation and teacher readiness to integrate basic English into the teaching and learning process.

Students have shown high enthusiasm for visual and interactive activities, reflected in their increased curiosity and willingness to use English in simple contexts. On the other hand, teachers who were initially hesitant stated that hands-on training successfully boosted their confidence in using English vocabulary and expressions in the classroom. These findings support the experiential learning approach, in which direct experience is considered capable of strengthening skill mastery and consistent application.

Although the scope and duration of the program were relatively limited, it highlighted the potential of community-based approaches in bridging the English language proficiency gap between rural and urban areas, as illustrated in the EF EPI 2024 data. To expand its impact, similar programs are recommended to be replicated in other rural schools with support in the form of ongoing mentoring, collaboration with education authorities, and regular professional training for teachers.

REFERENCES

Assingkily, M. S. (2021). *Metdoe Penelitian Pendidikan: Panduan Menulis Artikel Ilmiah dan Tugas Akhir.* Yogyakarta: K-Media.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Fadilah, R., Ayudhia, H. Y., Pratama, V. M., & Harmawan, V. (2023). Teachers' Teaching Reflection: English Teachers' Challenges in Rural Areas of Indonesia. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal*, *13*(1), 85–104. https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v13i1.8923

Hossain, Md. M. (2016). English Language Teaching in Rural Areas: A Scenario and Problems and Prospects in Context of Bangladesh. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *7*(3). https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.7n.3p.1

Kakerissa, W. M. (2021). A Descriptive Qualitative Study on Types of Teachers' Questions in Classroom Interaction. *Huele: Journal of Applied Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, *1*(2), 101–111. https://doi.org/10.30598/huele.v1.i2.p101-111

Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education, Inc.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Nasution, D. S., & Karimaliana. (2024). Exploring the Integration of Inquiry Based Learning into English Instruction at the Elementary School Level: A Qualitative Descriptive Study. *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, *10*(2), 513–524. https://doi.org/10.55637/jr.10.2.10034.513-524

Nugraheni, A. D., Nurkamto, J., & Putra, K. A. (2023). Teachers' Multilingualism Belief and Practice in Indonesian EFL Classroom. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *15*(3), 2655–2665. https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i3.2908

Pateşan, M., Balagiu, A., & Alibec, C. (2018). Visual Aids in Language Education. *International Conference KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANIZATION*, *24*(2), 356–361. https://doi.org/10.1515/kbo-2018-0115

Rahman, A., Hamid, M., Hizbana, A. F., Halik, N., & Budianto, L. (2024). University Students' Perspective on English Speaking Challenges: A Descriptive Study. *Journal of English Teaching Adi Buana*, *09*(01), 13–27. https://doi.org/10.36456/jet.v9.n01.2024.8763

Sari, R. L., & Gushendra, R. (2020). A Descriptive Qualitative on Teachers' Strategies in Teaching Listening Comprehension. *IJIELT: Indonesian Journal of Integrated English Language Learning*, *6*(2), 77–90. https://doi.org/10.24014/ijielt.v6i2.12302

Savignon, S. J. (2003). Teaching English as Communication: a global perspective. *World Englishes*, *22*(1), 55–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-971X.00272

Surwantini, E. (2016). EFEKTIVITAS PENGGUNAAN MEDIA VISUAL TERHADAP MOTIVASI BELAJAR DAN PRESTASI BELAJAR SISWA KELAS III SD GUGUS 01 IMOGIRI, BANTUL. *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan*, *8*(2). https://doi.org/10.21831/jpipfip.v8i2.8273

Tiurmina. (2018). PENERAPAN MODEL PEMBELAJARAN KOOPERATIF DENGAN MENGGUNAKAN MEDIA GAMBAR UNTUK MENINGKATKAN HASIL BELAJAR BAHASA INGGRIS. *Suara Guru: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Sosial, Sains, Dan Humaniora*, *4*(2). https://doi.org/10.24014/suara%20guru.v4i2.10212

Yuliani, S., Hartati, S., Sulaiman, M., Saptika, & Saputri, kurnia. (2023). Interactive Vocabulary Technique In Vocabulary Mastery Teaching: A Quasi-Experimental Approach. *Journal of English Education*, *1*(2), 63–72. https://doi.org/10.61994/jee.v1i2.356

Zaen, F. N. W., Miftakh, F., & Purnamasari, I. (2022). The Use of Wordwall Media to Enrich Students Vocabulary Size in EFL Class. *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan*, *8*(19), 127–136. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7165499.