

## Strengthening English Literacy among Elementary School Children through English for Children

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### Abstract

English has become an important competency that needs to be introduced from an early age, particularly for elementary school students who are in the golden age of language development. However, many children still have limited opportunities to practice English in a communicative, interactive way. This community service activity aimed to strengthen English literacy and critical thinking skills among elementary school students through the *English for Children* training program conducted at EDUMAX Center Sorong. The activity involved seven students from grades 1–6 and was implemented for one month through English learning assistance and interactive training activities. The methods included vocabulary introduction, daily expressions, simple conversation practice, picture-description activities using flip cards, educational games, songs, and role-play activities. Data were collected through observations, quizzes, speaking assessments, and participant feedback. The results showed improvements in students' mastery of basic English vocabulary, their ability to use simple daily expressions, their participation, and their self-confidence in speaking English. In addition, the use of flip cards helped students develop critical thinking skills through picture-description activities. The program also demonstrated that communicative and practice-based learning approaches can create a more enjoyable and effective learning environment for young learners. Therefore, this activity may serve as a practical model for strengthening English literacy among elementary school students, particularly in Eastern Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *english for children; english literacy; young learners; critical thinking; community service*

### Introduction

English is an international language that plays an important role in education, technology, communication, and human resource development in the era of globalization (McKay, 2018). Mastery of English from an early age has become increasingly important because English proficiency is no longer viewed as an additional skill, but as a fundamental competency that supports young generations in facing global developments (Khasanah et al., 2025). In Indonesia, attention toward English learning continues to increase, including at the elementary school level (Amin et al., 2023). Furthermore, national education policies are moving toward making English instruction compulsory by 2027. This condition indicates that students need to acquire a strong foundation in English from an early age in order to develop academic readiness and adequate communication skills for higher levels of education.

However, English learning at the elementary school level still faces various challenges. Many students do not have sufficient opportunities to actively use English in daily learning activities. Learning often focuses only on vocabulary introduction and memorization without providing continuous practice in the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In fact, learning a foreign language requires consistent exposure and practice so that students can understand and use it naturally in simple communication contexts (Saputro et al., 2024; Saputro et al., 2025; Saputro & Ingsaputro, 2025).

Teaching English to elementary school children is highly important because, academically, children are in the golden age of language development. At this stage, children's brains are highly

responsive to learning new languages, making them better able to imitate pronunciation, understand language sounds, and develop confidence in communication than when learning a foreign language at an older age. In addition, elementary school children are generally active, imaginative, and interested in play-based activities; therefore, English learning becomes more effective when delivered through interactive, communicative, and enjoyable learning experiences (Wael et al., 2026; Saputro & Rabia, 2025).

In Eastern Indonesia, particularly in Sorong City, strengthening English proficiency among elementary school children is becoming increasingly important. Sorong is one of the strategic regions in Southwest Papua that continues to develop in education, tourism, economics, and global connectivity. Children in this region need access to high-quality English instruction to compete and adapt to future educational and professional demands. Nevertheless, access to intensive and communicative English learning remains limited, especially in creating learning environments that encourage active English use from an early age. Therefore, non-formal educational programs are needed to strengthen children's English literacy through methods suitable to the characteristics and needs of students in Eastern Indonesia (Saputro & Ingsaputro, 2025; Saputro, 2025; Eddy & Faizin, 2024).

As part of the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, lecturers from Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong (UNAMIN) conducted a Community Service Program in collaboration with EDUMAX Center Sorong, an English course institution that provides English programs for early childhood, elementary, junior high school, senior high school, and general learners, including English for Nursery, English for Children, English for Junior, General English, and Conversation Class. This community service activity was conducted for one month through an English training program for elementary school students, focusing on strengthening communication skills and students' critical thinking.

The learning activities used picture-based flip cards to train students to describe images individually in simple English. In this activity, each student was asked to describe 3–5 picture cards based on vocabulary, colors, shapes, activities, or situations presented on the cards. This method not only helped students improve their vocabulary mastery and speaking skills but also trained their critical thinking, confidence in expressing ideas, and ability to construct simple sentences independently.

Through this community service activity, elementary school students were expected not only to experience enjoyable English learning but also to become accustomed to using English actively in simple communication activities. In addition, this program is expected to support students' preparation for the strengthening of English instruction in schools in the future and to serve as a collaborative model between higher education institutions and course centers in improving the quality of English education in Sorong City.

## **Method of Activity Implementation**

### ***Description of the Target Community***

The target community in this community service activity consisted of elementary school children (1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grades) who participated in the English for Children program at EDUMAX Center Sorong. The participants consisted of 7 children aged between 7 up to 12 years old. The participants had diverse English proficiency levels, ranging from beginner to basic. The involvement of the target community was demonstrated through students' active participation in all training activities, including attending learning sessions, playing language games, practicing simple conversations, and responding to evaluations conducted throughout the program.

### ***Parties Involved***

This community service activity involved several parties with complementary roles and contributions. The academic team served as program designers, learning facilitators, and evaluators of the training activities, drawing on approaches to teaching English to children. The English course institution partner contributed by providing the venue, training participants, and supporting the implementation of learning activities according to students' characteristics. In addition, course tutors or instructors contributed as learning assistants and helped adapt the learning materials to the participants' conditions and needs.

**Figure 1**

English Learning Mentoring



### ***Implementation Method***

The implementation of the activity was carried out through English language training and learning assistance for three weeks, with the following stages:

**Figure 2**

Method of Implementation

**Preparation Stage:** coordination with EDUMAX Center Sorong as the partner institution, identification of participants' needs, and preparation of English for Children learning materials.

**Implementation Stage:** English training activities covering the introduction of basic vocabulary, daily expressions, and simple conversation practices through interactive activities.

**Evaluation Stage:** assessment of training outcomes through observations, simple quizzes, and speaking practices to identify the improvement of participants' English literacy.

### ***Overview of Science and Technology Transferred***

The knowledge and technology transferred in this activity involved the implementation of a communicative English learning approach for children (English for Children), emphasizing contextual vocabulary, daily expressions, and simple communication practices. In addition, interactive learning strategies, such as educational games, English songs, and role-play, were introduced to increase children's engagement and motivation to learn.

### ***Instruments, Tools, and Materials***

The instruments used in this activity included observation sheets for students' participation, simple quiz questions, and speaking assessment rubrics. The learning tools and materials consisted of flashcards, picture media, student worksheets, and simple audio materials. These instruments were used to measure the achievement of the program objectives and the success of the English for Children training activities.

**Figure 3**

Learning English Flash Cards



### ***Data Collection Techniques***

Data were collected through several techniques, including direct observation during the learning process, quizzes administered at the end of the activities, and assessments of simple conversation practices. In addition, feedback from participants and partners was also used as supporting data to evaluate the implementation of the community service activity.

### ***Indicators of Activity Success***

The indicators of success for this community service activity included:

- a. Improvement in participants' mastery of basic English vocabulary
- b. Participants' ability to use simple expressions in daily communication
- c. Increased participation and self-confidence of participants in English learning activities;  
and
- d. Active involvement of participants throughout the training activities.

### ***Data Analysis Techniques***

The data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on the results of observations, quizzes, and students' speaking practices. Simple quantitative data obtained from the quizzes were analyzed using percentages to identify trends in participants' improvement, while qualitative data from observations and feedback were analyzed to describe changes in students' attitudes, interests, and participation during the community service activities.

## Implementation and Results

### *Data Analysis Techniques*

The Community Service activity through the English for Children Training Program was conducted for three weeks, involving elementary school students from first grade to sixth grades. The results of the activity were obtained through observations, simple quizzes, and speaking practice assessments conducted during and after the program. The findings were relevant to the activity's objectives, namely, strengthening children's basic English literacy.

In general, the activity had positive effects on vocabulary mastery, the ability to use simple expressions, and participants' participation and self-confidence in learning English. A summary of the activity's achievement indicators is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Indicator of Assessment

No	Success Indicators	Initial Condition	Condition After the Activity
1	Mastery of basic English vocabulary	Low–moderate	Improved
2	Ability to use daily expressions	Limited	Fairly good
3	Students' participation in learning activities	Partially active	Mostly active
4	Self-confidence in speaking English	Low	Improved

Based on Table 1, there was a noticeable improvement in all indicators of success after the implementation of the activity. The most significant improvement was observed in students' participation and self-confidence in learning English. This improvement was reflected in students' willingness to respond to questions, participate in simple dialogues, and actively engage in language games and role-play activities during the learning sessions. At the beginning of the program, several students were passive and hesitant to speak English. However, after participating in interactive learning activities throughout the training program, the students became more confident and enthusiastic in expressing simple ideas and responding to classroom interactions using English.

In addition, the results of the simple quizzes administered at the end of the activity indicated that most students were able to recognize and use the basic vocabulary taught, such as greetings, numbers, colors, family members, and daily expressions. The improvement in vocabulary mastery demonstrated that repetitive and contextual learning activities helped students understand and remember English words more effectively. Furthermore, speaking practice results showed that students were able to engage in simple conversations, including self-introductions and the use of everyday expressions, according to their language development level. Some students also described pictures using simple sentences during the flip-card activities, indicating the development of both speaking skills and critical thinking.

## Discussion

The results of this community service activity indicate that the *English for Children* training program was effective in strengthening English literacy among elementary school children. The findings are consistent with theories of child language acquisition, which state that the elementary school years are the *golden age* for language learning, during which children are more capable of acquiring foreign languages through meaningful and enjoyable activities. At this stage, children tend to imitate sounds, pronunciation, and simple expressions more naturally, especially when the learning process is interactive and communicative. Therefore, the communicative and practice-based approach implemented in this activity enabled students to learn English not only cognitively, but also affectively and psychomotorically.

The improvement in students' participation and self-confidence demonstrates that interactive learning methods, such as educational games, English songs, picture descriptions, and

role-play activities, created a supportive and enjoyable learning environment. During the program, students became more enthusiastic and more actively involved in classroom interactions than at the beginning of the activity. This condition suggests that children learn foreign languages more effectively when they are engaged in activities that encourage communication and self-expression rather than memorization-oriented learning. These findings also support previous community service studies, which report that communicative English-learning approaches are more effective for young learners because they encourage active participation and increase students' motivation to use the language in real contexts.

In addition, the use of flip cards as a learning medium significantly contributed to students' vocabulary mastery, speaking ability, and critical thinking skills. Through the picture-description activities, students were encouraged to observe, identify, and describe objects or situations using simple English sentences. This activity trained students not only to recall vocabulary but also to organize ideas and express them orally in a logical way. As a result, the students gradually became more confident in producing simple spoken English independently. The integration of critical thinking into English learning activities is considered important because it helps students develop creativity, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities from an early age.

From the perspective of collaboration, the involvement of EDUMAX Center Sorong as a partner institution contributed significantly to the success of the program. The synergy between academics and a non-formal educational institution enabled the transfer of knowledge and practical English teaching strategies that were relevant to students' needs and characteristics. This collaborative model may serve as a *best practice* for future community service programs in language education, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, where access to communicative English learning opportunities remains relatively limited.

Furthermore, this activity is closely related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (*Quality Education*), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Through this training program, elementary school children gained access to quality English learning experiences from an early age. This experience is expected to improve their readiness to face future educational challenges, globalization, and the increasing importance of English as a compulsory subject in Indonesia in the coming years.

### **Challenges in the Implementation**

Although the activity was implemented successfully, several challenges were encountered during the program. One of the main challenges was the difference in participants' English proficiency levels, as the students came from various grade levels (grades 1–6). This difference required adjustments to the learning materials and the teaching pace to ensure that all participants could follow the activities effectively and comfortably.

In addition, the relatively short attention span of elementary school children became another challenge in maintaining students' focus throughout the learning sessions. To address this issue, the learning activities were varied through the use of educational games, songs, role-play activities, and regular ice-breaking sessions to maintain students' enthusiasm and engagement. These challenges were considered natural and are supported by studies in children's learning literature, which state that language learning for young learners requires flexible teaching methods and adaptation to students' developmental characteristics and learning needs.

### **Conclusion**

The *English for Children* training program conducted at EDUMAX Center Sorong demonstrated positive results in strengthening English literacy among elementary school students. The activity improved students' mastery of basic vocabulary, their ability to use everyday expressions, their participation in classroom activities, and their self-confidence in speaking English. The implementation of communicative and interactive learning approaches, supported by

flip cards, educational games, songs, and role-play activities, created an enjoyable learning environment that encouraged active student engagement and the development of critical thinking.

In addition, the collaboration between academics and the non-formal educational institution contributed significantly to the program's successful implementation. This community service activity not only provided meaningful English-learning experiences for children but also supported students' preparation for the growing importance of English education in Indonesia. Therefore, the program may serve as a practical model for future community service activities aimed at improving the quality of English learning for young learners, particularly in Eastern Indonesia.

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