

Enhancing Rural Children's English Skills through "Mini English Camp: My English Life!": An Observational Evaluation

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Received:	Revised:	Accepted:	Available online:
16.05.2026	03.06.2026	19.06.2026	21.06.2026

Abstract: This article reports on an English language programme named "Mini English Camp: My English Life!" The programme aimed at enhancing the English skills of young learners in the village of Kalijoho, Argosari, Bantul, Yogyakarta. This goal of the programme was continually monitored through observations. The programme, which was part of a month-long service-learning project, was designed and delivered by six students from Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, with one serving as the lead facilitator. The primary goal of the programme was to introduce basic English language skills in an engaging and accessible way, while also boosting the learners' confidence and interest in English. The participants, aged 6 to 8, had minimal exposure to English in their daily lives, making this initiative crucial for fostering curiosity about the language. Each session, lasting 60 minutes, focused on interactive activities such as songs, games, and practical exercises, aimed at building vocabulary, simple phrases, and communication skills. The programme spanned five meetings, held after school hours to accommodate the children's schedules. The results suggest that, despite the limited number of sessions, the programme successfully introduced young learners to English in a fun and participatory environment.

Keywords: English for Young Learners, rural education, service learning

Abstrak: Artikel ini melaporkan program bahasa Inggris untuk meningkatkan keterampilan bahasa Inggris anak-anak di Dusun Kalijoho, Argosari, Sedayu, Bantul, Yogyakarta. Program ini merupakan bagian dari proyek pengabdian kepada masyarakat yang berlangsung selama sebulan dan dirancang serta dilaksanakan oleh enam mahasiswa Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, dengan satu mahasiswa bertindak sebagai fasilitator utama. Tujuan utama program ini adalah memperkenalkan keterampilan dasar bahasa Inggris secara menyenangkan serta meningkatkan rasa percaya diri dan minat peserta dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Tujuan program dimonitor menggunakan observasi yang berlangsung sepanjang sesi. Peserta yang berusia antara 6 hingga 8 tahun memiliki paparan terbatas terhadap bahasa Inggris dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, sehingga program ini bertujuan untuk menumbuhkan rasa ingin tahu dan ketertarikan terhadap bahasa Inggris. Setiap sesi, yang berlangsung selama 60 menit, menggunakan berbagai kegiatan interaktif seperti bernyanyi, bermain, dan latihan praktis untuk membangun kosa kata, frasa sederhana, dan keterampilan komunikasi dasar. Program ini terdiri dari lima pertemuan yang dilaksanakan setelah jam sekolah. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa meskipun jumlah sesi terbatas, program ini berhasil memperkenalkan bahasa Inggris dengan cara yang menyenangkan dan partisipatif.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Inggris untuk Anak, pendidikan di pedesaan, pengabdian kepada masyarakat

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid globalization, proficiency in English has become a key asset for children's future academic and professional opportunities. For young learners, creating engaging and meaningful learning experience is essential for developing not only knowledge of English but also confidence in using it.

In many rural contexts across the globe, the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) to young learners remains an under-served but crucial endeavour. As national and global demands for English proficiency increase, primary-aged children in rural and remote villages often remain at a disadvantage compared to their urban peers (Nasution et al., 2023). In Indonesia, for example, English for Young Learners (EYL) in rural areas continues to face multiple structural, pedagogical and socio-cultural challenges (Laila et al., 2023; Pramesty et al., 2022). With that in mind, the current article reports a village-based EFL programme designed for young children, offering both a case study of implementation and reflections on how meaningful English learning can be fostered in rural settings.

Young learners in rural schools often experience limited access to qualified English teachers, scarce teaching resources and low exposure to English outside of the classroom (Anggela et al., 2024; Hikmah & Astuti, 2025). For instance, studies report that rural primary schools frequently lack adequate facilities, teaching materials, and consistent institutional support. The lack of these essential factors constrain young learners' opportunity to engage meaningfully with English (Nasution et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2023). Moreover, research has highlighted that rural learners often exhibit weaker motivation, less confidence in speaking, and lower familiarity with English as a communicative language than urban learners (Yolanda & Sujarwati, 2025). These findings highlight the necessity for targeted programmes that are informed of the rural environment, adaptable to local constraints, and responsive to young children's needs.

The literature on Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) emphasises that young learners benefit most from interactive, playful, context-appropriate activities, and from environments that integrate movement, song, games and multimodal input (Aunurrahman et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in rural village settings where conventional EFL instruction may rely heavily on teacher-centred, textbook-based approaches, which risk disengaging young learners (Nasution et al., 2023; Pramesty et al., 2022). A study in rural Indonesia show that when teachers integrate joyful activities, local culture and meaningful tasks, young learners' engagement and vocabulary gains improve (Aunurrahman et al., 2022). Thus, designing a young-learner English programme in a rural village demands careful alignment of methods, materials and context.

In addition to pedagogical design, rural TEYL programmes must navigate socio-cultural and environmental factors. For example, a study on external factors influencing English learning in rural elementary schools in Indonesia found that school location, infrastructure, resource scarcity and dominant local languages all impacted children's English learning experiences (Yusuf et al., 2023). Similarly, a curriculum-adaptation study in rural West Papua highlighted how teachers simplified content, used locally-available materials and peer-collaboration to overcome resource constraints, and this led to improved student participation and oral communication (Nurteteng et al., 2024). These insights point to the importance of tailoring EFL programmes to rural realities rather than using urban models without any necessary adjustment.

From a motivational and affective viewpoint, young learners in rural areas often lack adequate English-use opportunities outside class. This reality often limits their motivation and exposure to input (Laila et al., 2023). Research into rural EFL learning strategies found that although students employed metacognitive and social strategies, strategy use was moderate. This moderate use of strategy may reflect constrained opportunities and less autonomy than urban students (Yolanda & Sujarwati, 2025). Therefore, it is deemed appropriate and even necessary to conduct programmes that create a "language-rich" environment, increase communicative opportunities and embed meaningful use of English. Such programmes can help overcome the gaps in terms of motivational and exposure.

The aforementioned issues regarding English learning among young learners in villages also happened in the village of Kalijoho, in the subdistrict of Argosari, Sedayu, Bantul, Yogyakarta. Based on the needs analysis through interviews with the head of the village, it was found that young children there needed English exposure. They almost never spoke English whilst the needs for English mastery in this globalised world just increased by the day.

In response to this need, conducting village training programmes or extra-school English experiences can be promising. Though less studied than formal classroom instruction, research in rural settings indicates that out-of-class activities such as village programmes can boost young learners' vocabulary, confidence and communicative competence (Khodijah et al., 2025) (Malik, 2025; For instance, Khodijah et al. (2025) reported that a community-service English programme in Gunung Mas village improved children's motivation and engagement via fun, interactive activities. These findings suggest that village-based programmes can complement school-based TEYL efforts by providing enriched input, social interaction and a playful learning environment.

Considering the gap between the ideal and rural realities, a programme in a rural village aiming to enhance young learners' English skills must address several aspects: appropriate methodology for young learners, adaptation to local constraints, building motivation and exposure, and creating interactive, meaningful tasks. The present article reports on such a programme, implemented in Kalijoho, a village in Bantul District, detailing its design, processes and outcomes. The programme aimed specifically to enhance children's listening and speaking of English while also boosting motivation and confidence through songs and games. In sum, this article contributes to the expanding field of rural TEYL by offering empirical evidence from a village-based English programme for young learners. By aligning with recent literature on rural EFL settings, pedagogical strategies for young learners, and extra-class English programmes, the report provides valuable insights on the pursuit to enhance English education in rural communities.

The present service learning programme was in line with the previous works of the authors, both in research (Satoto & Subekti, 2023; Sinaga & Subekti, 2025; Subekti, 2025) and community service activities (Subekti et al., 2022; Subekti & Rumanti, 2020). For example, a study by Sinaga and Subekti (2025) on self-efficacy in multiple language skills among Indonesian L2 learners highlights the importance of building confidence across language skills. This is a principle closely mirrored in this village programme, which aimed to boost both language skills and confidence among children. Another study highlights how fun and meaningful learning activities such as games, songs, and interactive tasks like the one that would be used in the present training can enhance participation and reduce anxiety (Satoto & Subekti, 2023).

It is realised that conducting language training in rural contexts may not be a first. Several slightly similar programmes have been conducted in different places across Indonesia (Fitriani et al., 2021; Nuha et al., 2023; Rohaniyah et al., 2025; Subekti et al., 2025; Umiyati & Widayanti, 2022). For example, a training programme by Nuha et al. (2023) highlights a home-based English language and reading program for children in Jemaras village, Kalimantan. The programme was deemed successful in enhancing the children's basic language skills and foster early literacy development. A recent training programme on young learners in a rural area was also conducted by the first author and colleagues (Subekti et al., 2025). The training was reported to be successful in enflaming the young participants' motivation to learn English, fostering their positive attitude and interest in learning the language despite the limited exposure to English in their immediate environment. That being said, considering that each programme was constrained to its location, having slightly similar programmes in different rural locations may help more rural children get better access to learning experiences.

2. METHOD

The programme was implemented on-site in Kalijoho, Argosari, Sedayu, Bantul, Yogyakarta. It involved six student facilitators from Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, with one taking on the role of the lead facilitator. A lecturer oversaw the programme's design. This initiative was part of a broader service-learning project, where students engaged in a month-long community-based programme. The primary goal was to introduce basic English language skills in a fun, interactive, and accessible manner. Additionally, the programme aimed to boost the participants' confidence and enthusiasm for learning English, especially in the village where there was limited exposure to the language. The focus was on building foundational vocabulary, simple phrases, and communication skills through games, songs, and hands-on activities. Although the programme spanned only five sessions, its overall purpose was to ignite interest in English among young learners aged 6 to 8.

The programme implemented formative assessment to assess learner progress in each of the meetings. It is in line with a phenomenological study by Turupcu (2014) emphasising that informal assessment is generally more preferable to assess young children's learning considering that these learners may not demonstrate their knowledge in traditional testing atmosphere such as pre-tests and post-tests due to their attention span, limited language, or limited test-taking skills. For this reason, the facilitators conducted observations during the facilitation sessions. Instruments included facilitator journals, photos, and field notes.

The programme consisted of five sessions, each lasting 60 minutes, in July 2025. The sessions were planned for 15:00 local time to ensure that participants had enough time after school. To promote the programme, the facilitators created electronic flyers, which were distributed throughout the community.

Table 1. The Overview of the Programme

Meeting No.	Day, Dates	Topic of the Day	Objectives	Attendees
1.	Saturday, 5 July 2025	Greetings	a. Introduce basic English greetings. b. Practice reading, memorizing, and using greetings in pairs. c. Engage in a fun singing activity to reinforce the lesson.	8
2.	Tuesday, 8 July 2025	About Me and Irregular Verbs	a. Review and practice common greetings in English. b. Introduce and practice irregular verbs. c. Learn how to introduce oneself using basic English phrases. d. Use a rap to help memorize irregular verbs.	8
3.	Tuesday, 15 July 2025	Greetings (Focus on Writing)	a. Reinforce greetings through singing and review. b. Practice writing greetings in small groups. c. Share and read out loud written greetings. d. Sing the greeting song again for reinforcement.	9
4.	Saturday, 19 July 2025	Daily Activities Vocabulary	a. Introduce vocabulary related to daily activities through a video. b. Practice pronunciation and writing. c. Engage in interactive activities such as quizzes and games. d. Reinforce learning with a group activity (chain message game).	8
5.	Tuesday, 22 July 2025	Parts of the Body (Focusing on Face Parts)	a. Learn vocabulary related to face parts (e.g., head, eyes, nose). b. Practice by drawing and labelling the parts of the face. c. Reinforce vocabulary through a singing activity. d. 4. Review vocabulary and give appreciation for the students' efforts.	8

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first meeting was conducted on 5 July 2025. The first meeting focused on greetings in English, with the goal of introducing children to common expressions used in daily interactions. The session began with a warm welcome, where the facilitators greeted the children and asked them how they were doing. After a short prayer, the facilitators and children introduced themselves, followed by a roll call to ensure all children were present. The main activity of the session involved brainstorming, where the children were asked if they knew what greetings were and to provide examples of greetings in both English and their native language. The facilitators then guided the children through a reading activity using the "Life Book," where they practiced reading common greetings in English. This was followed by a memorization activity, where the children were challenged to recall the greetings without looking at the book. To reinforce the material, the children practiced the greetings in pairs, which allowed them to actively engage with one another. The session ended with a fun song that incorporated the learned greetings, aiming to help the children retain the vocabulary in a playful manner. In the closing, the facilitators reviewed the material by

asking the children to recall the greetings they had learned. A mini quiz was conducted, where the children answered simple oral questions about the greetings.

The observation results suggest that overall, the first meeting was an insightful experience, allowing the facilitators to closely observe the children's enthusiasm. The children were engaged and actively participated, which made the learning process smooth. However, the facilitators recognized the challenge of teaching young learners aged 6-8, requiring clear and simple language and the ability to capture their attention throughout the lesson.

The second meeting was conducted on 8 July 2025. It aimed to introduce the children to irregular verbs and the structure of self-introduction in English. The session began with a friendly greeting. The children then sang a song they had learned in the previous meeting, which was a fun way to transition into the lesson. The first activity was a review of the previous meeting's greetings material, where the facilitators asked the children to recall common greetings in English, such as "Good morning" and "Good afternoon." After the review, the facilitators introduced the concept of irregular verbs by guiding the children through the reading of the irregular verbs in their "Life Book." The children practiced reading the verbs correctly, followed by a memorization activity, where they had to recall the verbs without looking at the book. To make the learning process more engaging, the facilitators introduced a rap-style activity to help the children memorize the irregular verbs in a fun and energetic way. The next part of the session involved introducing the topic of self-introduction, where the children read a short version of "Introducing Myself" from their Life Book. The facilitators demonstrated how to introduce oneself, including stating their name, age, and place of origin, and then the children practiced this with a partner. This allowed the children to apply what they had learned in a more interactive setting. The session concluded with a review of the material and a mini quiz on irregular verbs.

The facilitators observed that the children were becoming more comfortable with the learning process and were enjoying the activities. This meeting was an encouraging sign that the children were increasingly engaged and motivated to continue learning. The session ended with an announcement about the next meeting, which would take place after a short break.

Furthermore, the third meeting, on 15 July 2025, focused on writing skills, with a particular emphasis on practicing writing greetings in English. The main activity began with a fun recall of the greeting song, which served as a refresher for the material covered in the previous meetings. The children were then asked to review the greetings in both English and their native language, recalling what they had learned. Following the review, the facilitators guided the children through a writing practice activity, where they wrote down the greetings in small groups. The facilitators provided dictation and offered guidance throughout the activity, ensuring that each student was able to practice writing the greetings. Once the children completed their writing, they read their work aloud to their classmates, which allowed them to practice speaking as well. To wrap up the session, the greetings song was sung to reinforce the lesson and make it more memorable. The session concluded with a review of the material, where children were asked to share the greetings they had written and their meanings. The facilitators praised the children for their neat writing.

The observation indicated that this meeting helped both the children and facilitators connect more deeply, as it allowed the facilitators to assess the children's writing skills and reflect on their teaching methods. Despite the time it took to complete the writing activities, the children enjoyed the process. It can be seen from their enthusiasm and the relaxed and fun atmosphere throughout the session.

The fourth meeting on 19 July 2025, focused on expanding the children's vocabulary related to daily activities. The main activities started with a video that introduced various vocabulary related to daily activities. After watching the video, the children repeated after the facilitators to practice correct pronunciation. This was followed by a writing exercise, where the children were asked to write down at least five words or phrases from the video. To further reinforce the vocabulary, the class played a quiz game using Wordwall, where children guessed images related to the daily activities they had just learned. The final activity involved a fun chain message game, where children

acted out movements based on a sequence of messages, helping them associate vocabulary with actions. At the end of the session, the children were asked to review the daily activities vocabulary they had learned.

From the observation, it can be seen that this meeting reinforced the importance of keeping the lessons interactive and engaging. The facilitators learned that teaching young children requires a lot of energy and creativity to maintain a positive and productive learning environment. Despite the challenges, the children were eager to participate in the activities.

The fifth and final meeting of the program was conducted on 23 July 2025. It focused on teaching the children about parts of the body, with a specific emphasis on the face. The main activities began with a video about different body parts, particularly the face. The video was played twice to help the children properly mimic the pronunciation of each part. Following the video, the children participated in a drawing activity where they were asked to draw the parts of the face in sequence, which helped them visualize and reinforce their understanding of the topic. After the drawing activity, the children labelled the different parts of the face in English, reinforcing their vocabulary and spelling skills. To make the lesson more engaging, the children sang a song about body parts, pointing to the corresponding parts on their faces as they sang along. This helped the children connect the vocabulary with physical actions, further embedding the terms in their memory. The session ended with a review of the material, where the children were asked to point to the parts of the face while saying the English terms aloud. The facilitators praised the children for their enthusiasm and dedication to learning. After a final prayer, the program concluded with a heartfelt thank you and farewell from the facilitators.

This final meeting emphasized the importance of consistency in learning, as the children's cognitive progress was evident through their active participation. The facilitators also realized the value of thorough preparation to ensure smooth and effective learning experiences. The children's excitement and engagement throughout the session were a testament to their positive learning journey.

4. CONCLUSION

In general, the English programme can be considered to have run smoothly and had a positive impact. All sessions were successfully carried out, offering a variety of content that was appropriate for the participants' age group. The children showed enthusiasm and active engagement in various activities, including reading, memorizing, singing, playing games, and hands-on practice. Despite the possible limitations of the programme itself, the majority of the children attended consistently and demonstrated progress in their understanding from one session to the next.

The programme also provided valuable learning opportunities for the facilitators, particularly in developing effective, engaging strategies for teaching a foreign language to young children. Key challenges included maintaining the children's attention, adapting communication styles to suit their developmental needs, and creating a dynamic and enjoyable learning environment. These challenges served as important learning experiences, enhancing the facilitators' ability to engage the students in meaningful ways. The direct involvement in the children's learning process was rewarding and insightful. It is hoped that the programme will lay a strong foundation for the children of Kalijoho, not only fostering their English language skills but also sparking their interest and cultivating love for the language.

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