

“SMART KIDS’ ENGLISH CORNER”: FACILITATING YOUNG LEARNERS IN A RURAL AREA TO LOVE ENGLISH

**Adaninggar Septi Subekti¹, Queen Alfa Milka Kriswandi², Velline Gisella
Sutanto³, Richard Alvin Rafjanza⁴, Katharina Winahyu Premono⁵, Arka
Jedidian Alvinio⁶, Matthew Alexander Sujanto⁷**

^{1,2}Faculty of Education and Humanities, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Jalan dr. Wahidin
Sudirohusodo, 5-25 Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³Faculty of Business, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Jalan dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo, 5-25
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

^{4,5}Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Jalan dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo, 5-25
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

^{6,7}Faculty of Information Technology, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Jalan dr. Wahidin
Sudirohusodo, 5-25 Yogyakarta, Indonesia

¹e-mail adaninggar@staff.ukdw.ac.id

Abstract

Given the importance of English proficiency in the era of globalization and the limited exposure to English in rural communities, a training program entitled “Smart Kids’ English Corner” was designed to empower young learners aged 5 to 12 years in the village of Tapen, Argosari, Sedayu, Bantul, Yogyakarta. The program consisted of four sessions conducted in July 2025. It provided opportunities for learners to practice introducing themselves and their parents, naming colours and shapes, naming fruits and vegetables, and expressing themselves using basic English. A total of 27 learners participated and practiced spoken English in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. Overall, the program aimed to foster a positive attitude and early interest in learning English, with the expectation that participants would develop an optimistic view toward the language. Despite several limitations, such as the limited relevance of some learning activities, the program can be considered successful, as the participants appeared to enjoy each learning moment throughout the sessions.

Keywords: English, training, rural area, young learners

Abstrak

Mengingat pentingnya penguasaan Bahasa Inggris di era globalisasi dan kurangnya paparan terhadap Bahasa Inggris di lingkungan pedesaan, program pelatihan Bahasa Inggris bertajuk Smart Kids’ English Corner dirancang untuk memberdayakan pelajar muda usia 5 hingga 12 tahun di Dusun Tapen, Argosari, Sedayu, Bantul, Yogyakarta. Program ini terdiri dari empat pertemuan yang dilaksanakan pada Juli 2025. Program ini memfasilitasi para pelajar untuk belajar memperkenalkan diri dan orang tua mereka, menyebutkan warna dan bentuk, menyebutkan buah-buahan dan sayuran, serta mengekspresikan diri dalam bahasa Inggris dasar. Sebanyak 27 pelajar berpartisipasi dalam program ini, di mana mereka berlatih berbicara bahasa Inggris dalam suasana yang menyenangkan dan santai. Secara umum, program ini bertujuan untuk menumbuhkan rasa cinta terhadap bahasa Inggris di kalangan para pelajar, dengan harapan mereka akan memandang bahasa Inggris secara optimis. Meskipun ada limitasi, seperti relevansi beberapa aktivitas pembelajaran, program ini dapat dianggap sukses mengingat para peserta tampak menikmati setiap momen pembelajaran sepanjang sesi.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris, pelatihan, daerah pedesaan, pelajar muda

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English has become an essential skill for communication, education, and professional development. As the most widely spoken language, it bridges cultural and linguistic gaps, enabling individuals to access a wealth of knowledge, connect with people across the globe, and participate in the international workforce. In other words, English has become a vital tool for communication, education, and career advancement (Siahaan et al., 2022). Likewise, it is also repeatedly mentioned that English has become a crucial skill that opens doors to broader communication and educational opportunities (Subekti, 2018, 2019, 2020). For example, she found that learners with higher self-perceptions of their communication competence tend to initiate communication more (Subekti, 2020). To develop such a positive self-perception, learners need continuous exposure and practice. In layperson's terms, learners need to feel good about themselves and their language skills. Only then would they be willing to communicate in the language.

The reality and the need to master English in the increasingly globalised society may, at times, not align with the 'bubbles' in some communities that still see English as something remotely relevant to their lives. One such 'bubble' may be found in rural communities. In rural areas, children frequently encounter significant challenges in learning English due to limited resources, inadequate exposure, and a lack of access to quality education. These challenges create an educational divide between young learners in rural and urban areas, with young learners in rural areas frequently missing out on crucial language skills that can hinder their academic and professional development. Additionally, Muller (2021) stated that the lack of adequate and innovative instruction in schools located in rural areas may generally lead young learners to receive less individualized attention and thus miss out on foundational language skills necessary for their future. A recent study by Subekti (2025) also reported that learners from rural areas had difficulty projecting their dreamed study or career trajectories, mainly due to the belief in the slim prospect of pursuing higher

studies. The aforementioned research studies highlight the need for young learners in rural areas to nurture a love for learning and their overall academic motivation.

Informed by these findings, the authors conducted a needs analysis through an interview with the head of Tapen village in Bantul Regency. It was found that the realisation of the need to master English had been present. However, the community, especially young learners still in school, really needed exposure to English. For example, many children in the village had limited access to English, and thus had limited basic English vocabulary. In fact, children will benefit more when they have early exposure to the language as English is now a global language used in the increasingly globalised world (Matsuda, 2020). To address the gap indicating the mismatch between the village children's English and the ideal competence expected in this globalised world, an informal English training program for young learners was designed.

For the authors, this language programme may be the first to target elementary school students. Previously, several language programmes have been conducted with Senior High School students (Subekti et al., 2021, 2024) or teachers (Subekti et al., 2022; Subekti & Rumanti, 2020; Subekti & Susyetina, 2020) as the participants. For example, a reasonably recent language programme was conducted to facilitate Senior High School learners to converse in English on topics that uncover their talents, potentials, and possible challenges coming from within them (Subekti et al., 2024). Through the facilitation, learners could comfortably discuss mental and physical health, dreams, and fears in English. The series of language programmes may provide an illustration of how language programmes can be tailored to various learner needs, including young learners like those in the present programme. This present programme would also be the first to be conducted in the village setting rather than the school setting. Despite the differences in the target participants and the setting, both the previous and the present programmes aimed to empower society through improved mastery of English.

The present programme was named “Smart Kids’ English Corner,” in the belief in the potential of all the participants joining the programme. It is believed that fostering a love of English learning from an early age is essential (Mamani-Calapuja et al., 2023; Trilestari et al., 2024). For example, by learning the language in a fun way through Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, young learners can associate English with a positive learning experience, which can reinforce their positive association with the language going forward (Trilestari et al., 2024). “Smart Kids’ English Corner” may offer valuable support by providing engaging English language learning experiences that are crucial for bridging the education gap in rural communities, particularly due to a lack of exposure and limited innovative language instruction at school.

The importance of conducting “Smart Kids’ English Corner” is to spark interest in English learning among young learners in the village. It may provide them with the necessary tools and confidence to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world. By offering engaging language learning opportunities, this programme may help level the ‘playing field’ for rural young learners. In other words, it could open doors to broader educational opportunities, empowering them to reach their full potential . “Smart Kids’ English Corner” was designed to engage young learners in rural areas through fun, interactive, and hands-on learning activities. By incorporating games, songs, and other creative methods, the programme aimed to make English learning enjoyable, helping students build a positive attitude toward the language. This approach not only teaches language skills but also instils a love for learning, which can encourage students to continue their language development beyond the program. Engaging students through enjoyable and relatable content is critical in cultivating long-term interest in English and this is exactly where the present programme plays its crucial role.

METHODS

The programme was conducted *in situ*, in Tapen village, a rural area in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta. The programme's facilitators were six students from Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, one of whom became the lead facilitator. A lecturer supervised

the programme's design. It was part of a larger project where students participated in a month-long service-learning programme in the community. The main aim of the programme was to introduce basic English language skills in a fun, interactive, and accessible way. The programme also intended to boost participants' confidence and interest in learning English, particularly in the village where exposure to the language was minimal. The programme was tailored to build foundational vocabulary, simple phrases, and communication skills through games, songs, and hands-on activities. Whilst four meetings may not seem like a lot, the programme as a whole aimed to spark curiosity about English among young learners of Elementary School level aged 5 to 13. Other than based on ages and educational level, there was no other selection criterion. All children falling in the criteria were welcomed to the programme. The programme could involve a total of 27 children.

The programme was designed to consist of four 60-minute meetings, to be held in July 2025 in the village. The sessions were scheduled for 15:00 local time to give participants ample time after school. To prepare for the programme, the facilitators created electronic flyers, which were then distributed throughout the community. An example of the flyers is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 The Programme's Electronic Flyer

As a whole, Table 1 summarizes the dates of each meeting, the materials, and the number of participants.

Table 1 Overview of the Programme

No	Days and Dates	Topics	Attendance
1	Wednesday, 2 July 2025	My Name is ...	27
2	Friday, 5 July 2025	Colour and Shapes Adventure!"	25
3	Saturday, 19 July 2025	Fruits and Vegetables!	10
4	Tuesday, 22 July 2025	Celebration of Learning	10

The aforementioned topics were selected based on several considerations. Learning to introduce oneself is one of the first steps in language acquisition. The topic "My Name is ..." helps children practice basic conversational skills and introduces them to personal pronouns, greetings, and introductions. It also builds confidence as children get comfortable speaking about themselves and interacting with others in English, which is crucial for their social development (Agazzi, 2022). Next, colours and shapes are concrete, visual concepts that children already recognise in their environment, making them ideal for building vocabulary in English (Dewi & Supriyanti, 2017). Furthermore, an English course topic on fruits and vegetables connects language learning to children's everyday lives, making it relevant (Alifia & Gumiandari, 2021). After children have gone through several topics, a "Celebration of Learning" session gives them a chance to reflect, produce language, share what they've learned, and celebrate their progress.

The teaching strategy focused on interactive, engaging, and age-appropriate activities. The sessions used the combination of activities such as songs, games, the uses of flashcards, and hands-on activities like sorting. Each session tried to balance structured learning with fun, interactive elements to maintain engagement and reinforce language learning for the young participants.

Furthermore, considering that the participants were young children, there was no formal pre-test or post-test. The success of the programme would be indicated by the facilitators' observations on the children participants' engagement throughout the programme and the changes they observed in the participants' use of English, for example, their speaking confidence, vocabulary retention whilst having game-based and other activities during the sessions.

To evaluate the programme, an evaluation meeting was conducted on 27 July 2025. In the meeting, all the facilitators and the supervisor of the programme discussed what had run well and what aspects needed improvements. The facilitators used qualitative measures of participant observations where the facilitators reflected on how the sessions had been run.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In total, there were four meetings throughout the programme. The first meeting's topic was "My Name is ...". It was held on Wednesday, 2 July 2025, and 27 participants attended. The session began with a brainstorming session titled "Hello, My Name Is..." where the participants were asked about their names and whether they had ever introduced themselves before. They were allowed to respond in Indonesian, but the facilitators also encouraged them to use English if they could. Some participants seemed to be hesitant, whilst others were eager to give it a try. Participants were not only encouraged to introduce themselves but also to introduce their parents. For example, they were to say "My father is..." and "My mother is..." This activity allowed them to practice speaking about family members, which, though challenging, was still manageable. To lighten the mood in the middle of the session, the participants were engaged in a kinaesthetic activity through the game 'Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.' In this activity, they had to touch their head, shoulders, knees, and toes while saying the corresponding words at an increasingly faster pace (Family Lives, 2024). By the end of the session, the participants were given a challenge. They had to introduce themselves in English. The facilitators randomly called on participants to

introduce themselves, offering rewards to those who did so well. As an additional challenge, students who volunteered were also given a reward. The activity created a fun, competitive environment, motivating participants to practice their English-speaking skills. Throughout the session, the participants were highly engaged. Around 85% of participants successfully introduced themselves and their families in English, an excellent achievement for the first meeting.

The second meeting was held on Friday, 5 July 2025, with the topic "Colour and Shapes Adventure!" 25 participants attended. The goal of the session was for the participants to recognise and name basic colours and shapes in English. The session started with a brainstorming activity in which the children were asked to name the colours they saw around them in Indonesian, then guess the English words for those colours. This activity effectively engaged the children from the start. The first activity involved the facilitators providing rainbow-coloured origami paper (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple). The participants were asked to repeat the colours in English as they identified them. The facilitators would hold up a piece of paper and ask, "What colour is this?" and the children responded with "It is red," "It is blue," and so on. Next, the participants were divided into five groups based on the colours of the origami paper they chose. The facilitators instructed the participants to line up and guided them in folding the paper into different shapes, demonstrating each shape first. The participants practiced naming the shapes, with the tutor asking, "What shape is this?" and the participants answering, "It is a circle," "It is a square," or "It is a triangle." The third activity was game time. The participants lined up again, but this time they were grouped differently. They played a word-chain game in which everyone except the group leader closed their eyes. The participants at the end of the line had to guess the colour and shape given to them by the facilitators. This activity was enjoyable and allowed participants to actively apply their knowledge of colours and shapes in a relaxing manner. To summarise the lesson, by the end of the session, the facilitators asked the participants to explain what they had learned that day. Those who answered correctly were given small rewards. The facilitators then reviewed the material again

to ensure everyone understood the lesson. The participants seemed excited, having learned about colours and shapes in English through a variety of engaging activities. The picture of the participants and the facilitators in the second meeting can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Facilitators and participants in the second meeting

The third meeting was conducted on Saturday, 19 July 2025. The topic was "Fruits and Vegetables!" The goal was for the participants to name fruits and vegetables in English. The session began with a brainstorming activity where the participants were asked to name their favourite fruits and vegetables in Indonesian. Next, the facilitators guided them to say the names in English. Before diving into the lesson, participants played a game called "Up and Down and Shake, Shake, Shake," in which they follow a series of actions such as moving up and down or shaking their bodies in sync with the rhythm or instructions given. The participants seemed energised after playing the game. To facilitate participants' understanding of fruits and vegetables, the facilitators helped them match the pictures on the cards they received to the corresponding fruits and vegetables. Each participant was given two cards and had to find someone with the matching fruit or vegetable on their card. Once paired up, the pairs needed to name the fruit or vegetable in English. Next, while remaining in their pairs, the participants were

to switch the cards between pairs. The task was to remember the new fruits and vegetables shown on the cards they were given. Afterward, they returned the cards to the facilitators. Some participants were able to name several different vegetables and fruits after doing this activity. Furthermore, in the next activity, "Last Card!", participants randomly picked cards and said the fruit or vegetable shown on each card in English, then found the person holding the matching card. The game continued until all the cards were used, and the participants were tasked to mention at least five fruits or vegetables they had learned from the activity. In this session, only ten participants attended. With fewer participants, the facilitators had to adapt the activities to ensure they ran smoothly, since the games had been prepared for a group of 20. Despite the smaller group, the session objectives were still successfully achieved. The participants were able to participate actively, and they seemed to enjoy the lesson all the same.

The fourth meeting, or the last in the programme, was intended to celebrate learning. It was conducted on Tuesday, 22 July 2025. Again, only 10 participants attended the session. In addition to facilitating some fun games, the facilitators reviewed all the materials in the previous sessions on self-introduction, colours and shapes, as well as fruits and vegetables. Card games dominated the session as they reviewed the lessons they had learned. At the end of the session, the facilitators said their goodbyes, giving each participant a small memento as a token of appreciation. The participants shared their impressions of the lessons and took a group photo together to mark the occasion, which is shown in Figure 3. Despite the smaller class size, the participants seemed engaged in a variety of interactive activities.



Figure 3 Facilitators and participants in the fourth meeting

Several key aspects require further comment regarding the programme's implementation. The first is on the lower attendance rate in the third and fourth meetings. In the evaluation meeting conducted after the programme had been completed, it was speculated that this drop in attendance may be attributed to the fact that, in the third and fourth meetings, the participants had already started their new school year. Some participants may feel tired after hours of school and would rather rest at home. It could be coupled with school-related responsibilities, such as homework or extracurricular activities, that may coincide with the times of the English programme. That said, the drop in attendance may have been due to a lack of publicity for the event, given the two-week gap between the second and third meetings. Whilst electronic flyers had been distributed throughout the community, they could have been enhanced with door-to-door invitations, where the facilitators located the children's houses and handed them printed or written invitations for the event.

The next key aspect was the use of auditory and kinaesthetic activities throughout the programme. First of all, the activities could liven up the mood and the atmosphere of the session. A research study also reported a significant improvement in students'

speaking abilities after engaging in kinaesthetic learning activities (Usuluddin et al., 2024). Besides, it has been reiterated that "music and movement naturally connect to children's hearts, minds, and bodies." (Shin, 2017, p. 14). That said, in the context of the present language programme, such kinaesthetic activities could have been more closely aligned with the day's objectives. For example, the "Head, Shoulder, Knee, and Toe" activity may be more effective when discussing body parts rather than for self-introduction. Likewise, the "Up and Down and Shake, Shake, Shake" activity may be better suited to a session on giving instructions rather than on fruits and vegetables. If the facilitators had used kinaesthetic activities aligned with the session objectives, these activities could have served not only to boost participants' spirits but also to provide them with more opportunities to practice the target language of the day, rather than solely helping them relax and recharge.

That said, the programme can be considered quite successful, given several key indicators. First, throughout all the sessions, the participants seemed to enjoy learning English together thoroughly. They could be seen practicing their English most of the time, despite their limitations. Next, ten young participants diligently attended all sessions, likely recognizing the merits of joining such a programme for their learning. Though the scope may be minimal, it could be an embryo, instilling further learning for them in the future. They should nurture the spirit and keep it alive to motivate them to succeed in their learning, not only in English but also in pursuing their education in general.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, several important takeaways should be highlighted. "Smart Kids' English Corner" has become a successful avenue for young learners in the village to improve their basic English. Although the number of sessions was limited and thus the overall impact, the program may have planted the seeds of a love for English in a community that currently views the language as irrelevant to their lives. As a whole, it may be a beginning in cultivating participants' academic motivation to pursue higher

studies, broadening their horizons, and helping them understand the importance of learning foreign languages in an increasingly globalised world. Whilst some limitations in the quality and relevance of the materials and activities are acknowledged, they can also be seen as part of the learning process for the university student facilitators, who were and are still developing their skills and applying what they have learned to contribute to the community.

REFERENCES

- Agazzi, A. (2022). The importance of learning vocabulary for young learners. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 9(8), 56–60. <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v9i8.3897>
- Alifia, Q. R., & Gumiandari, S. (2021). The role of English for early children. *Al-Gurfah: Journal of Primary Education*, 2(1), 15–29. <http://ejournal.iain-bone.ac.id/index.php/algurfah/article/download/5452/1883/13073>
- Dewi, F. K., & Supriyanti, N. (2017). Developing vocabulary learning materials using the theme-based approach for the third grade students of the elementary school. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 6(2), 95–100. <https://journal.student.uny.ac.id/elt/article/viewFile/10060/9625>
- Family Lives. (2024). *Head shoulders knees and toes*. Family Lives. https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/early-years-development/singing-with-your-baby/head-shoulders-knees-and-toes?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Mamani-Calapuja, A., Laura-Revilla, V., Hurtado-Mazeyra, A., & Llorente-Cejudo, C. (2023). Learning English in early childhood education with augmented reality: Design, production, and evaluation of the “Wordtastic Kids” app. *Education Sciences*, 13(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070638>
- Matsuda, A. (2020). World Englishes and pedagogy. In C. L. Nelson, Z. G. Proshina, & D. R. Davis (Eds.), *The handbook of World Englishes* (2nd ed., pp. 686–702). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Muller, J. (2021). *Language education in rural areas: Challenges and opportunities*. Springer.
- Shin, J. K. (2017). Get up and sing! Get up and Move! Using songs and movement with young learners of English. *English Teaching Forum*, 14–25. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321758380_Get_Up_and_Sing_Get_Up_and_Move_Using_Songs_and_Movement_with_Young_Learners_of_English

- Siahaan, A., Ardayati, A., & Ramasari, M. (2022). The importance of instrumental motivation among students in teaching English as foreign language (TEFL) process. *Education of English as a Foreign Language Journal*, 5(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.educafl.2022.005.01.01>
- Subekti, A. S. (2018). An exploration of foreign language anxiety in the Indonesian university context: Learners' and teachers' voices. *TEFLIN Journal*, 29(2), 219–244. <https://journal.teflin.org/index.php/journal/article/view/590>
- Subekti, A. S. (2019). Willingness to communicate in English of non-English major university students in Indonesia. *Lingua Cultura*, 13(1), 55–66. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v13i1.5155>
- Subekti, A. S. (2020). Self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension: A study of Indonesian college students. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 5(1), 14–31. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.5.1>
- Subekti, A. S. (2025). Gender differences in academic motivation among rural Indonesian junior high school students. *Revista Brasileira de Educação Do Campo (Brazilian Journal of Rural Education)*, 10(e19634), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.70860/ufnt.rbec.e19634>
- Subekti, A. S., Ermerawati, A. B., Susyetina, A., Kurniawati, L. A., Lestariningsih, F. E., Endarto, I. T., & Wati, M. (2024). “My personal victory”: Pelatihan daring percakapan bahasa Inggris untuk siswa SMA. *MARTABE: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 7, 4440–4453. <https://doi.org/10.31604/jpm.v7i11>
- Subekti, A. S., & Rumanti, M. R. (2020). Pelatihan Bahasa Inggris untuk guru Sekolah Dasar di Yogyakarta di masa pandemi Covid-19. *Jurnal Pengabdian Pada Masyarakat*, 5(4), 1077–1086. <https://doi.org/10.30653/002.202054.518>
- Subekti, A. S., & Susyetina, A. (2020). IELTS speaking training for High School teachers in Yogyakarta. *MATAPPA: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 3(2), 80–86. <https://www.ojs.unm.ac.id/pubpend/article/view/58942>
- Subekti, A. S., Winardi, A., Susyetina, A., & Lestariningsih, F. E. (2021). Online English Club for high school students: “Going Global.” *Abdimas Umtas: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 4(2), 770–781. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35568/abdimas.v4i2.1387>
- Subekti, A. S., Winardi, A., Wati, M., Ermerawati, A. B., Kurniawati, L. A., Endarto, I. T., Susyetina, A., & Lestariningsih, F. E. (2022). Pelatihan bahasa Inggris bagi guru-guru SMA Bopkri 1 Yogyakarta: Belajar tidak mengenal batas usia. *MARTABE: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 5(5), 1949–1963. <http://jurnal.um-tapsel.ac.id/index.php/martabe/article/download/7233/pdf>
- Trilestari, K., Manurung, R. M. L., & Simangunsong, V. N. (2024). The benefits of

learning English in early childhood: Positive and negative effect. *Esteem Journal of English Education Study Programme*, 7(2), 669–681. <https://doi.org/10.31851/esteem.v7i2.16151>

Usuluddin, U., Fikni, Z., Husnu, M., & Nadia, R. (2024). Exploring the impact of kinesthetic learning strategies on speaking ability: A study for integrating movement and English language. *Culturalistics: Journal of Cultural, Literary, and Linguistic Studies*, 8(2), 54–62. <https://doi.org/10.14710/ca.v8i2.24128>