

Meaningful Learning in Teaching English to Young Learners at PPA IO-0133 Krammer Hilina'a in Kota Gunungsitoli

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Abstract: This community service program was designed to help teach English to young learners in a meaningful way at PPA IO-0133 Krammer Hilina's school in Kota Gunungsitoli. The program included 23 young learners who were between 9 and 11 years old. It took place in nine sessions, each with hands-on and engaging activities. The methods used were observation, writing down notes, and using worksheets to check how participative and active learners were involved and what they answered. The learning materials covered topics like introducing yourself, talking about jobs, family, body parts and things around us, which were all things learners came across every day. The results showed that when learners had meaningful learning experiences, they became more involved, more motivated, better at learning vocabulary, more confident when speaking, and better at communicating. Interactive activities like songs, games, discussions, and role-plays made the learning environment fun and lively. The results show that meaningful learning is a good way to teach English to young learners because it helps them link new information with what they already know and their everyday lives. These results show that teaching English in a way that is engaging and involving interaction is helpful for young learners in both school and other learning environments.

Keywords: meaningful learning, teaching English, young learners, participation, communication skills

Abstrak: Program pengabdian masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk menerapkan pembelajaran yang bermakna dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris kepada siswa sekolah dasar di PPA IO-0133 Krammer Hilina'a, Kota Gunungsitoli. Program ini melibatkan 23 siswa berusia 9 hingga 11 tahun dan dilaksanakan dalam sembilan sesi dengan menggunakan kegiatan pembelajaran interaktif. Metode yang digunakan meliputi observasi, catatan lapangan, dan lembar kerja untuk menilai partisipasi dan respons siswa. Materi pembelajaran berfokus pada pengenalan diri, pekerjaan, keluarga, bagian tubuh, dan benda-benda di sekitar kita yang berkaitan erat dengan pengalaman sehari-hari siswa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran bermakna meningkatkan partisipasi, motivasi, penguasaan kosakata, kepercayaan diri dalam berbicara, serta keterampilan komunikasi siswa. Kegiatan interaktif seperti lagu, permainan, diskusi, dan permainan peran menciptakan suasana belajar yang menyenangkan dan menarik. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran bermakna merupakan pendekatan yang efektif dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris bagi siswa berusia muda karena memungkinkan mereka mengaitkan pengetahuan baru dengan pengalaman masa lalu dan konteks kehidupan nyata. Temuan ini mendukung penggunaan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang bermakna dan interaktif bagi siswa berusia muda, baik dalam lingkungan pendidikan formal maupun non-formal.

Keywords: pembelajaran bermakna, pengajaran bahasa Inggris, siswa berusia muda, partisipasi, keterampilan komunikasi

1. INTRODUCTION

English is now one of the most important languages used around the world in schools, technology, talking to people, and getting jobs in the future. So, teaching English to young learners is important because kids are at a stage where they can pick up a language naturally by interacting with others and having real-life experiences (Annamaria Pinter, 2017; Cameron, 2001). Teaching English to young learners shouldn't just focus on memorizing words, but instead should offer learning activities that help them relate new information to their everyday lives.

Young learners between the ages of 9 and 11 have different traits compared to teenagers and grown-ups. Children learn better when they are actively involved in activities like games, songs, stories, acting out roles, and working together with others (Cameron, 2001). Learning that connects with what young learners already know helps them build new knowledge, which makes them more interested and active in class activities (Slavin, 2014).

The community service program took place at PPA IO-0133 Krammer Hilina in Kota Gunungsitoli, which is a non-formal educational institution that offers educational support to children. Before starting the program, the tutors did a quick check and saw that while most young learners were excited to learn English, there were still some problems they needed to work on. Many young learners had a small English vocabulary, weren't sure about speaking English, were shy to answer questions, and

often stayed quiet during lessons. Learning activities were still mainly focused on introducing basic vocabulary, but young learners didn't get enough chances to connect the English words to their own real-life situations.

These conditions show that we need a way to teach English that keeps young learners interested and helps them relate what they're learning to their everyday lives. One way to handle this is through Meaningful Learning, which focuses on connecting new information with what young learners already know and how it applies to real life (Slavin, 2014). Through meaningful learning, young learners are encouraged to not just memorize words but also to understand and use the language in real-life situations. Moreover, learning that really matters helps build abilities like talking with others, working together, coming up with new ideas, and thinking carefully, as Deep Learning highlights (Fullan et al., 2018).

Many previous studies have talked about meaningful learning in school-like environments, but there aren't many studies looking at how this kind of learning happens in community service programs at non-school places. This is especially true in Kota Gunungsitoli. So, this community service program was meant to use Meaningful Learning to teach English to young learners at PPA IO-0133 Krammer Hilina'a.

The objectives of this activity are:

1. To describe the implementation of Meaningful Learning in TEYL in *PkM* activities at PPA IO-0133
2. To describe young learners' participation and meaningful learning impacts
3. To analyze young learners' responses toward the learning process

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL)

Learning English for early childhood is a learning process that must be adapted to the way children grow and develop. Children tend to have an easier time understanding and remembering lessons if the learning is fun, engaging, and involves hands-on experience. According to (Annamaria Pinter, 2017), teaching language to children should provide opportunities for them to actively participate in meaningful communication activities. In addition, according to (Cameron, 2001), children are more likely to understand and remember language if they learn through play, singing, storytelling, and activities related to their daily lives.

Teachers play an important role in creating a learning atmosphere that supports the growth of children's language skills. According to (Watkins, 2014), English teachers must apply interactive and student-focused learning methods to make the learning process more effective and engaging. Therefore, doing different types of activities is essential in learning English for early childhood.

2.2 Theory of Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning is a way of learning that allows young learners to connect new information with what they already know. (Bloom & Keil, 2001) say that language plays an important role in helping a person understand concepts and develop more complex thinking. When young learners can relate new material to their own experiences, the learning process will be more meaningful and easier to understand.

According to (Slavin, 2014), meaningful learning not only relies on memorization, but also understands concepts more deeply. Young learners are expected to actively develop their own knowledge by interacting in the learning environment. In addition, (Wahyuni, 2024) emphasizes that contextual learning methods can improve young learners' understanding because the subject matter is connected to the real conditions they experience in daily life.

2.3 Deep Learning

Deep Learning is a learning method that emphasizes in-depth understanding of concepts as well as young learners' ability to apply the knowledge they learn in a variety of real-world conditions. According to (Fullan et al., 2018) Deep learning not only teaches the material, but also builds 21st-century skills such as communication, teamwork, creativity, critical thinking, and character building.

In line with that, (Nugroho et al., 2026) reveal that deep learning approaches can increase young learners' participation in the learning process as well as help them develop the ability to connect knowledge with everyday experiences. Thus, learning becomes more meaningful and has a lasting impact on young learners growth.

2.4 Young Learners Engagement in Language Learning

Young learners involvement in learning is an important factor that affects learning outcomes. According to (Hiver et al., 2023), young learners engagement includes three aspects, namely behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. This aspect can be seen from the active participation of young learners, their interest in the material, and the effort they put into the learning process.

(Bhaskar, 2022) says that effective teachers can create a learning environment that makes young learners more interested and participating, using interesting and interactive ways of teaching. In learning English, young learners participation is essential because it gives them more opportunities to actively use the language they are learning.

2.5 Use of Songs and Interactive Activities in English Learning

Songs and interactive activities are often used in teaching English to children. According to (Aliya et al., 2023), using songs that contain a specific theme can help children learn words in English better. Songs can also make the spirit of learning better and create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere.

In addition, according to (Sari et al., 2018), the use of songs, games, and stories in learning English can make young learners more enthusiastic and increase their interest in learning. These activities help young learners understand lessons in a more natural way and in accordance with the way children grow and develop.

2.6 Differentiated Instruction

This different approach to learning takes into account the different needs, interests, and ways young learners learn. According to (Tomlinson, 2014), teachers must adjust the material taught, how to learn, and how to measure young learners progress so that each young learner can learn optimally according to their uniqueness and characteristics.

(Rohmah & Marharini, 2025) say that by understanding young learners' learning styles, teachers can create better and more effective learning strategies. By using different learning approaches, young learners can learn in the way that suits them best, so that their learning achievement can increase to the maximum.

2.7 Approaches and Methods in Language Learning

The selection of appropriate methods and methods is very important in learning English. According to (Nasaruddin Umar, 2011), the approach to learning a language must pay attention to the learning objectives, the nature of the young learners, and the learning situation used. A learner-focused approach provides wider opportunities for them to interact and use language in meaningful situations.

In learning English for young children, using a friendly and fun way is highly recommended because it can help children learn to speak English more naturally. Therefore, teachers must combine various teaching methods so that learning goals can be achieved properly.

3. METHODS

Activities Design

This community service program used a descriptive qualitative method to explain how Meaningful Learning was applied in teaching English to young learners. The study looked at how learning happened, how the young learners took part, and what they said during the program.

Participants and Setting

The community service program took place at PPA IO-0133 Krammer Hilina'a in Kota Gunungsitoli, and included 23 young learners who were between 9 and 11 years old. The program took place across nine meetings, and each meeting was about 90 minutes long.

Stages of Community Service Activities

The implementation consisted of four stages.

1. Preparation Stage

During this stage, the team worked with the PPA management, looked at the learners' traits, made lesson plans, learning materials, observation forms, worksheets (LKPD), and teaching tools.

2. Implementation Stage

The implementation stage included nine learning meetings that covered:

Introducing Yourself

- Jobs
- My Family

- Parts of the Body
- Things Around Us

Each lesson applied Meaningful Learning through:

- Ice breaking
- Songs
- Games
- Discussion
- Question and answer
- Role play
- Presentation

The learning materials were made to link English words with the everyday lives of young learners.

3. Evaluation Stage

At the end of each meeting, tutors checked how much learners were involved by looking at observation sheets, field notes, classroom talks, worksheets, and other records.

4. Reflection Stage

After each meeting, the tutoring team talked about what was going well, what needed work, and what they should focus on next time. The results from the reflection were used to make changes and improve how lessons were taught in the following sessions.

In short, Figure 1 presents the stages of community service activities implemented during the program as shown below.

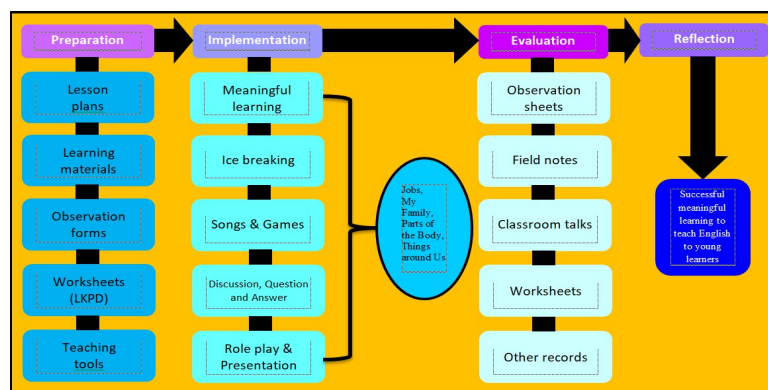


Figure 1. Stages of Community Service Activities

Instruments

The data were collected using:

- Observation sheets
- Field notes
- Students' worksheets (LKPD)
- Photographs

The observation sheet assessed:

- Classroom participation
- Willingness to answer questions
- Confidence in speaking English
- Cooperation during group activities
- Learning motivation

After every meeting, field notes were written right away to keep track of what happened in the classroom, how learners reacted, any difficulties they faced during activities, and what the tutors thought about their experiences.

Data Analysis

The data from the observation was looked at by comparing how much the young learners were involved at the start of the program with how much they were involved at the end. The percentages in Table 1 were determined by looking at how many young learners showed the expected signs during the classroom observations. The field notes were looked at in three steps: reducing the data, grouping it into categories, and making sense of it. This helped find common themes about how young learners took

part, built their vocabulary, felt about their confidence, and responded to activities that made learning meaningful.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Implementation of Meaningful Learning

The results of the observation show that the meaningful learning approach has succeeded in increasing young learners' participation during the learning process. Materials related to daily life made it easier for young learners to understand concepts and remember new words.

The use of songs, games, discussions, and speaking exercises demonstrated the principles of teaching English to young learners as described by (Annamaria Pinter, 2017; Cameron, 2001). Interactive learning helps increase young learners engagement when participating in English learning activities (Hiver et al., 2023).

To meet the goals of the community service program, the learning process was carried out over nine meetings based on meaningful learning principles. The first meeting was about getting to know each other in the classroom, breaking the ice, and finding out what the young learners already knew. The second and third meetings brought up the topic of introducing oneself through monologue and dialogue activities. Young learners worked on introducing themselves by connecting the expressions to their personal identities and everyday experiences. The fourth meeting talked about jobs, and the young learners listed the types of work they often saw in their families and around them. The fifth and sixth meetings were about the young learners' families. They were encouraged to talk about their family members with a partner and give short presentations. The seventh and eighth meetings used songs, games, Total Physical Response (TPR), and role-play activities to teach parts of the body and help remember the vocabulary better. The ninth meeting was about things around us, and the young learners looked at and named objects they found in their classroom and at home. In each meeting, the learning activities were based on good teaching methods. They linked new English words to young learners' real-life situations, which helped them stay involved, talk with each other, and practice communication.

4.2 Increasing Young learners' Participation

Based on the observation sheet, more than 80% of the young learners showed an increase in active participation during the nine meetings. The young learners who were initially inactive began to dare to answer questions and speak in English. In the following, Table 1 presents how young learners' participation increased.

Table 1. Increasing Young learners' Participation		
Aspects	Beginning	End
Courage to speak	40%	82%
Participation through discussion	45%	87%
Vocabulary mastery	38%	84%
Learning motivation	52%	90%

Increasing young learners' participation shows that meaningful and contextual learning activities successfully motivated young learners to be more actively involved in the learning process. These findings are in line with the opinion (Slavin, 2014), that says that meaningful learning can increase young learners' active participation. These findings are also in line with the opinion (Bhaskar, 2022), who says that effective teaching encourages young learners' participation.

4.3 Increasing Vocabulary Mastery

Materials entitled *Jobs, Family, Body parts and Things around Us* provided a real learning experience, made it easier for young learners to remember new words. The contextual learning activity helped young learners connect words in English to their daily lives. These findings are in line with the opinion (Bloom & Keil, 2001), who say that language helps to understand concepts, as well as (Wahyuni, 2024), that affirms that contextual learning improves young learners understanding. The use of songs helps improve the ability to master vocabulary, as reported by (Aliya et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2018).

4.4 Young learners' Responses toward the Learning Process

Based on observation sheets, field notes, and classroom interactions, the young learners showed positive responses toward the meaningful learning activities implemented during the community service

program. Most young learners expressed enthusiasm when participating in songs, games, discussions, and role-play activities because the learning materials were closely related to their daily experiences. Young learners became more confident in asking and answering questions, participating in group discussions, and performing simple English conversations.

The meaningful learning approach also created a positive classroom atmosphere in which young learners were willing to communicate without feeling afraid of making mistakes. The integration of interactive learning activities encouraged young learners to enjoy the learning process while improving their English vocabulary and speaking skills. These findings support (Hiver et al., 2023), who emphasize that young learners engagement contributes significantly to successful language learning, and Bhaskar (2022), who explains that effective teaching creates a supportive learning environment that increases young learners' motivation and participation.

4.5 Discussion

The results of this community service activity support several theories that have been published by (Annamaria, 2017; Cameron, 2001) related to teaching English to young learners. Using songs, games, role-playing, and discussions helps create a more meaningful learning experience, thus increasing young learners' participation and confidence. These findings also correspond to (Bloom & Keil, 2001; Slavin, 2014) who state that learning becomes more effective if young learners can relate new knowledge to experiences they already have. Moreover, these results support the opinion of (Fullan et al., 2018; Nugroho et al., 2026), that deep learning helps young learners apply their knowledge in real-world situations. Young learners' participation during the community service activity shows the concept of young learners' involvement proposed by (Bhaskar, 2022; Hiver et al., 2023). The tutors also adjusted the type of learning activities according to the abilities of each young learner, reflecting the principle of differentiation teaching as explained by (Rohmah & Marharini, 2025; Tomlinson, 2014). Finally, the communicative learning approach applied during the community service activity was in accordance with the principles of language teaching that have been explained by (Nasaruddin, 2011).

Furthermore, the first objective of this community service program was successfully achieved through the implementation of meaningful learning principles in each meeting. Each learning topic was designed to connect new English vocabulary with young learners' prior knowledge and real-life experiences, enabling young learners to understand and apply the language more meaningfully.

The second goal of this community service program was also accomplished by making young learners more involved and showing how learning that really matters can have good effects. The results from the observations indicated that young learners participated more in class discussions, felt more confident when answering questions, and were more ready to speak in English during all nine sessions. The better vocabulary, more interest in learning, and greater confidence in speaking show that real learning helped young learners improve their language skills. These findings back up (Slavin, 2014) who says that real learning makes young learners take part actively, and (Fullan et al., 2018) who believe that meaningful learning helps young learners improve their speaking and working together, and understand things better by using real-life learning situations. This finding supports (Slavin, 2014) who argues that meaningful learning occurs when new knowledge is connected to existing cognitive structures.

The third objective, namely analyzing young learners' responses toward the learning process, was also achieved. Observation results indicated that young learners responded positively to the learning activities. They showed greater enthusiasm, confidence, and willingness to participate in classroom communication. Interactive learning through songs, games, discussions, and role plays created an enjoyable learning environment that encouraged young learners to actively use English during classroom activities. These findings reinforce the concept of young learners engagement proposed by (Bhaskar, 2022; Hiver et al., 2023), highlighting that active participation and positive emotional involvement contribute to successful language learning.

In the following, Pictures 1-5 present several learning activities implemented during the community service program done based on the tutors' planning what and how to teach young learners in the non-formal education.



Picture 1. Practicing Self-Introduction



Picture 2. Young Learners Learning Jobs Vocabulary



Picture 3. Young Learners Learning Family Vocabulary



Picture 4. Young Learners Learning Body Parts through Songs and Games



Picture 5. Young Learners Learning Things around Us

The application of meaningful learning in teaching English at PPA IO-0133 Krammer Hilina'a in Kota Gunungsitoli has proven to be successful in increasing young learners' participation, motivation, vocabulary mastery, and confidence. Combining games, songs, discussions, and speaking exercises creates a fun and meaningful learning atmosphere. Therefore, this approach is recommended to be used in teaching English to young learners who are still in an early age, both in formal and non-formal educational institutions. These findings support several theories that have been put forward by researchers such as (Annamaria Pinter, 2017; Cameron, 2001; Fullan et al., 2018; Hiver et al., 2023; Slavin, 2014). They state that English learning activities that are meaningful, interactive, and relevant to the real context can increase young learners' participation, enthusiasm, vocabulary understanding, and communication skills.

Using meaningful learning made young learners more involved and helped them better understand vocabulary, and it also made them feel more positive about their learning experience. Young learners grew more excited, sure of themselves, and took part actively in all nine meetings because the activities they did were closely linked to their everyday lives. So, all three goals of the community service program were reached: providing meaningful learning experiences for teaching English to

young learners, encouraging more young learners involvement, and noticing the positive reactions young learners had to the activities.

SUGGESTIONS

1. PPA must continue the English learning program on an ongoing basis.
2. The English Education Study Program at the University of Nias must continue the same various community service activities.
3. Further community service needs to look at the long-term effects of meaningful learning on young learners' language skills.

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