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Implementation of Thematic Community Service Lectures: Practical Insights into Teaching English Vocabulary in Junior High Schools

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Abstract

This community service project implemented through the Thematic Real Work Lecture (KKN-T) aims to strengthen English vocabulary learning for seventh-grade students at MTS Muhammadiyah Balassuka by applying realia-based instruction as a practical and contextual teaching strategy. The program was designed in response to the limited availability of learning media and the need for more interactive vocabulary learning activities in rural schools. Using a qualitative approach and the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) method, the activities involved classroom observations, direct interactions with students, and collaborative planning with teachers. Vocabulary lessons were conducted by introducing real objects available in the classroom, enabling students to learn words through concrete visual experiences. This approach increased student engagement, improved vocabulary recall, and encouraged active participation. The English Camp program, conducted as a supporting activity, further enhanced students' motivation by providing enjoyable and interactive language exposure. Evaluation and monitoring showed significant improvements in students' ability to recognize and pronounce English vocabulary, along with the sustained use of the method by the teacher after the program ended. The results indicate that realia-based learning is an effective, low-cost strategy suitable for schools with limited facilities. This program contributes to enriching teaching practices and provides a sustainable model for improving English vocabulary learning in rural educational settings.

Introduction

English language learning at the junior high school (SMP) level plays a crucial role in developing students' global literacy skills. One of the main problems found in various schools, particularly in areas like Balassuka Village, is students' low vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary is a fundamental component that influences reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills (Nation, 2018). Low learning motivation, a lack of learning media, and conventional teaching methods are contributing factors to limited student achievement in English learning (Alqahtani & others, 2015).

The rationale for this program stems from the belief that university students, as future educators, have significant potential to make significant contributions to improving the quality of learning through the development of creative media and direct mentoring of teachers. Research by Ashari et al. (2022) shows that students in community service programs play a crucial role in helping teachers adapt to learning technology, including the use and creation of more effective digital media. Prospective teachers are highly motivated to design interactive learning media, which positively impacts the quality of the teaching and learning process (Wresni et al., 2025). Based on these two findings, student involvement in the Thematic Community Service Program (KKN-T) can provide

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significant support for teachers in developing more engaging, innovative, and easily implemented vocabulary learning strategies in the classroom.

The urgency of this community service activity arose from the need for English teachers in Balassuka Village to obtain more interactive, engaging vocabulary learning media and methods that are appropriate to the characteristics of junior high school students. Teachers require support in the form of alternative teaching strategies that can increase student engagement and help them understand vocabulary more easily. This verse provides a spiritual basis for strengthening learning through student mentoring as part of an effort to honor the educational process in schools. Various studies also show that the use of visual-based learning media, vocabulary games, and contextual approaches are effective strategies for increasing vocabulary retention while fostering students' interest in learning. Mayer (2014) explains that visual media can strengthen comprehension and memory through the simultaneous integration of verbal and visual information. Interactive activities and repeated exposure to vocabulary in meaningful contexts significantly assist students in remembering and using new words (Nation, 2018). Findings from Webb and Nation (2017), coupled with Schmitt's (2000) opinion, indicate that language games and context-based activities can increase student motivation and strengthen their lexical skills. Based on these research findings, this community service program was designed to meet the learning needs of partner schools through the development of engaging vocabulary media, the implementation of interactive methods, and direct learning mentoring.

Overall, this program aims to improve students' vocabulary mastery through the implementation of more engaging and varied learning strategies. It is also designed to support teachers in developing simple, effective, and easy-to-use learning media that can be applied sustainably after the KKN program ends. Furthermore, the program focuses on creating a learning environment that encourages students to be more active in understanding and using English vocabulary. Therefore, the hypothesis of this activity is that the use of visual media and interactive learning methods can significantly improve students' vocabulary skills and learning motivation.

Collaboration between KKN-T students and the school at MTS Muhammadiyah Balassuka has an important role in creating more varied and meaningful English vocabulary learning. Through direct involvement in class activities, students can present new perspectives and fresher teaching strategies, thus encouraging more lively learning interactions (Jihad, 2025). The exchange of ideas and practices that takes place during the mentoring process not only increases students' motivation in participating in learning, but also provides opportunities for teachers to gain additional insight into more effective teaching approaches. In this way, the synergy that exists between students and partner schools forms a learning environment that is adaptive, collaborative and responsive to student needs. Overall, these conditions support the achievement of the objectives of KKN-T activities in strengthening vocabulary mastery while improving the quality of English language learning at the junior high school level.

Methods

Research Approach

This community service activity employed a qualitative research approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the English learning situation in the classroom and students' responses to the vocabulary learning activities. A qualitative approach enables

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researchers to explore learning processes, classroom interactions, and participants' experiences within their natural context. To strengthen participant involvement, this approach was integrated with the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) method, which emphasizes active participation, collaboration, and shared problem-solving throughout the implementation process (Darmawan et al., 2020). The combination of qualitative inquiry and PLA created opportunities for KKN-T students, teachers, and learners to collaboratively identify classroom needs, implement contextual learning strategies, and reflect on the outcomes of the activities.

Research Site and Participants

The activity was conducted at MTS Muhammadiyah Balassuka, located in Balassuka Village, Kuncio Pao District, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 21 seventh-grade students who participated in the English vocabulary learning program. English teachers at the school also participated as collaborators during the planning and implementation stages by providing information regarding classroom conditions, existing teaching practices, and students' learning needs. Their involvement ensured that the designed learning activities were appropriate for the school's context and could be sustained after the completion of the KKN-T program.

Needs Assessment

The first stage of the activity involved identifying students' learning needs through classroom observations and informal interviews with the English teacher. Classroom observations focused on teaching strategies, student participation, learning resources, and classroom interaction during English lessons. Informal interviews were conducted to obtain additional information regarding the challenges teachers experienced in vocabulary instruction and the learning media commonly used in the classroom.

The findings indicated that vocabulary instruction was predominantly delivered through conventional teacher-centered explanations with minimal use of visual or concrete learning media. Students generally memorized vocabulary without sufficient contextual support, making it difficult for them to associate new words with real-life objects. These findings highlighted the need for a more contextual learning strategy capable of increasing student engagement and facilitating meaningful vocabulary acquisition.

Planning and Development of Learning Media

Based on the needs assessment, KKN-T students collaboratively designed vocabulary learning activities utilizing the realia approach. Realia refers to the use of authentic objects from the surrounding environment as instructional media, allowing learners to observe, touch, and directly identify vocabulary items. This approach was selected because it provides concrete learning experiences that improve students' understanding and retention of new vocabulary (Yuliani et al., 2025).

The learning materials focused on everyday classroom objects, including books, tables, chairs, whiteboards, markers, erasers, pens, bags, windows, doors, and other commonly encountered items. School teachers were actively involved in reviewing the lesson plans and selecting appropriate vocabulary to ensure that the activities aligned with students' proficiency levels and classroom conditions. Furthermore, previous qualitative studies have demonstrated that realia-based instruction strengthens vocabulary comprehension by connecting language learning with authentic experiences (Sitepu & Kurniawati, 2021), while also enhancing students' learning motivation (Sari & Pajrini, 2024).

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Implementation of Learning Activities

The learning activities were implemented during the KKN-T program through approximately five instructional meetings scheduled according to the overall KKN-T agenda in Balassuka Village. Since English teaching constituted a supporting rather than a primary program, the number of instructional sessions depended on the availability of time during community service activities.

Each meeting introduced basic English vocabulary through direct interaction with real classroom objects. The instructional procedure began with the facilitator pointing to an object while pronouncing its English name. Students were then encouraged to repeat the pronunciation collectively and individually before identifying similar objects within the classroom. Interactive learning techniques, including question-and-answer sessions, guided conversations, repetition drills, and object identification activities, were incorporated to reinforce vocabulary learning. This learner-centered process encouraged active participation and enabled students to connect English vocabulary with tangible objects in their immediate environment.

Data Collection

Data were collected throughout the implementation using qualitative techniques. Classroom observations documented student participation, classroom interaction, learning engagement, and responses toward the realia-based vocabulary instruction. Informal interviews with the English teacher were conducted before and after the implementation to gather insights regarding classroom needs, teaching experiences, and perceived changes in students' learning motivation. Field notes prepared by KKN-T students served as supplementary documentation to record significant events, students' participation, and reflections during each learning session.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. Observation notes, interview results, and field documentation were organized, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring themes related to student engagement, vocabulary learning experiences, and the effectiveness of the realia-based instructional approach. The analysis emphasized describing the learning process and participants' responses rather than measuring statistical outcomes. Findings from multiple data sources were compared to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the implementation of the PLA-based realia approach contributed to improving English vocabulary learning in the classroom.

Superior Program

The flagship program in implementing KKN-T in Balassuka Village is directed at improving the English vocabulary skills of class VII MTS Muhammadiyah Balassuka students through the use of the realia method, namely the use of real objects in the classroom as learning tools. This program was chosen because it is able to provide direct benefits for students' understanding, especially in school contexts that have limited learning media. This approach also answers the needs of teachers and schools who require teaching strategies that are simple, easy to apply, but still effective in supporting the student learning process.

Implementation of the program was carried out in several meetings which were adjusted to the main agenda of KKN-T. Students introduce vocabulary through direct activities

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such as pointing to real objects, markers, erasers, books, tables, chairs and asking students to name and repeat them. This step makes learning more concrete and helps students connect words with objects they see directly. Previous research shows that realia-based learning can improve vocabulary understanding and strengthen students' memory (Sitepu & Kurniawati, 2021).

Apart from regular lessons in class, this special program is strengthened by holding an English Camp. English Camp is an activity for learning English as a second language, where participants spend time in English class with other students and take part in interesting activities and excursions (Aini et al., 2024). This activity is a superior work program activity that we carry out in the Real Work Lecture service, an intensive activity for three days from 3 to 5 November at the Darul Arqam Muhammadiyah Balassuka Islamic Boarding School. English Camp was created to familiarize students with communicating in English through various interesting activities such as group games, vocabulary challenges, object identification, and simple speaking exercises. This activity serves as a very effective support because students can apply the vocabulary they have learned in class in a more enjoyable and organized situation. Various studies show that immersion-based activities such as English Camp can improve vocabulary memory, build confidence in speaking, and increase students' learning motivation (Ningsih, 2023).

Through a combination of realia learning in the classroom and English Camp activities, the flagship KKN-T program in Balassuka not only provides direct and contextual learning experiences for students, but also expands their English practice space in a more active and collaborative atmosphere. The synergy of these two approaches can have a significant impact in increasing students' vocabulary understanding while strengthening their confidence in using English in simple situations.

Result

The implementation of the KKN-T program showed that students experienced an increase in their ability to understand and use English vocabulary after attending five learning sessions based on real experiences. Students who previously had difficulty recognizing basic vocabulary began to show progress in naming, identifying and understanding the meaning of words better. Activities involving real objects such as books, markers, erasers, and tables help students associate words with objects that are directly visible, thus strengthening their memory of vocabulary. Continuous use of real objects can accelerate vocabulary comprehension because students learn through direct experience of what they see and touch. Learning becomes easier to understand, and the relationship between words and objects becomes closer when students are involved in real activities. Observations during activities show that an approach that uses real objects can increase students' confidence in recognizing and mentioning vocabulary, as well as helping them remember words more quickly compared to oral methods alone. This is in line with research by Deviga and Deviga and Ardhani, (2024) which shows that the use of real objects can increase the accuracy of vocabulary recognition in students at the secondary level, and also with research by Ummi Kalsum, (2025) which states that realia is effectively used in schools with limited facilities because it can increase student attention and involvement.

The results of these activities show an increase in students' motivation and their participation in learning. The three-day English Camp helps students expand their vocabulary through vocabulary challenge and object identification activities, which encourage them to use English more naturally. This program can be assessed as good,

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because the three main objectives of increasing vocabulary, strengthening simple teaching methods for teachers, and creating an interactive learning environment have been achieved very well even though the time available is limited. Teachers also reported positive changes in student participation and stated that this method would be easy to implement in future lessons.

Apart from improving knowledge and skills, this activity produces organized learning media in the form of a list of class objects. This list can be used by teachers as a guide in teaching vocabulary. This product is not a new physical device, but rather the arrangement and rearrangement of real objects in the classroom that can be used as sustainable teaching media. This product description includes a list of vocabulary that corresponds to real objects in the classroom, instructions for its use which are divided into three stages (introduction, pronunciation, and context), as well as simple example sentences. The advantages of this product are that it does not require additional costs, is easy to use in schools with limited facilities, and is suitable for students' lives. However, the drawback is the limited variety of vocabulary, depending on the objects in the class, so teachers still need to develop it further. These results are in line with recent research which shows that the use of real media and direct visual experiences can strengthen the connection between words and their meanings, thereby helping students remember vocabulary. Reality-based learning allows students to see and interact with the objects being studied, making the information received more meaningful. Research by Mohammad, (2021) reveals that visual media has the ability to significantly increase students' vocabulary mastery because it provides concrete and easy-to-understand stimuli. These findings support that learning that prioritizes visual experiences and real contexts, such as the use of reality in this activity, is effective in accelerating vocabulary mastery and improving students' understanding in the long term.



Figure 1. English Learning in Class by the KKNT Inass Team of MTS Muhammadiyah Balassuka

Discussion

Evaluation And Monitoring Stages

Steps for evaluation and monitoring are carried out after all learning activities and main programs are completed. The purpose of the evaluation is to understand how effective the program is, assess the achievement of the goal of strengthening words, and evaluate

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how well the realia method and English Camp activities increase student participation. The evaluation process is carried out through direct observation during learning, analysis of notes in the field, and reflection on the results of activities in collaboration with the school. Apart from that, teachers are also asked to provide input regarding the development of students' abilities and whether the method is suitable for use in routine learning.

Supervision after the program aims to ensure the continued impact of activities, especially in the use of a list of real media that has been prepared as a learning tool. This supervision is carried out through continuous collaboration between the service team and teachers, both face-to-face and through online communication. This method is designed to ensure that teachers continue to apply the teaching techniques introduced during the program, and can develop vocabulary variations according to curriculum needs.

Apart from that, monitoring is also carried out by reviewing students' progress after the program, including their ability to recognize and mention vocabulary that was previously taught. This information is important to see the sustainability of the program's impact as well as identifying aspects that need strengthening. Overall evaluation and monitoring provides a comprehensive picture of the success of the program and becomes the basis for preparing recommendations for further service activities.

Conclusion

The KKN-T program held in Balassuka Village has succeeded in having a positive impact on the English vocabulary mastery of class VII MTS Muhammadiyah Balassuka students. By using the realia method, students get a learning experience that is more real, easy to understand, and relates to their environment. The use of real objects such as markers, erasers, books, and other objects in the classroom has been proven to increase word understanding, vocabulary retention, and student participation during lessons.

English Camp's flagship program also offers additional support to create a fun and interactive learning environment. Overall, this service activity not only strengthens students' vocabulary mastery, but also helps teachers find learning strategies that are simple and can be continuously applied. The evaluation results show an increase in learning motivation, student engagement in class, and the success of using reality-based methods in learning English.

Advice

Based on the results of the activity, schools are expected to continue to use and increase the use of realia media in teaching English, because this method has been proven to be effective and does not require additional expenditure. It is hoped that teachers can continue to utilize real objects in the classroom and around the school to introduce new vocabulary in a more interesting and meaningful way.

For future service programs, it is necessary to expand material for other English skills, such as basic speaking and reading, so that learning is more comprehensive. In addition, ongoing monitoring is required to ensure the sustainability of the program's effects and to assess the need for further development. Collaboration between students, teachers and schools must continue to be maintained so that innovation in learning can continue to grow according to students' needs.

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