

Assisting Prospective Teachers in Learning Indonesian for Elementary School Children

Ayi Abdurahman^{1*}, Ahmed Waseem Khattak², Jihad Jaafar Waham³

¹ Nusa Putra University, Indonesia

² Islamic University, Pakistan

³ University of Basrah, Iraq

* Correspondence email: ayi.abdurahman@gmail.com

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Abstract

This community service program was designed to address the limited pedagogical readiness of prospective teachers in teaching Indonesian language to elementary school students by applying the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model. The program aimed to strengthen pre-service teachers' competence and creativity while improving students' engagement and literacy through culturally grounded learning practices. Conducted over three months at SD Negeri 2 Nanga Jetak, Sintang Regency, the activity involved prospective teachers from Universitas Nusa Putra and local educators through stages of discovery, dream, design, and destiny. Data were collected using observation, interviews, documentation, and questionnaires, then analyzed both quantitatively (including correlation analysis) and qualitatively (thematic analysis). The results showed a significant improvement in students' vocabulary and reading comprehension, as well as increased confidence and reflective awareness among prospective teachers. The program demonstrated that utilizing local linguistic and cultural assets can effectively enhance language learning outcomes. In conclusion, this community engagement not only empowered schools and teacher candidates but also contributed to the sustainable development of context-based Indonesian language education.

Keywords

ABCD Model, Indonesian Language Learning, Prospective Teachers.



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Indonesia's primary education landscape has witnessed increasing interest in enhancing the teaching and learning of the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) in elementary schools. The national curriculum emphasises the development of students' literacy, communication and cultural identity through Indonesian language instruction. Recent studies highlight that language learning is not only a fundamental

academic skill, but also a pillar for students' social participation, self-expression, and connection with local culture and society (Al Farizi, Sudiyanto, & Hartono, 2019). Meanwhile, teacher preparation programmes are being encouraged to equip prospective elementary school teachers with competencies in both pedagogy and language teaching for young learners. In this context, supporting aspiring teachers to effectively teach Indonesian to children is a timely and necessary endeavour.

Despite this favourable policy background, several problems persist in the actual practice of Indonesian language instruction at the elementary level. Empirical research points to significant obstacles: the dominance of local or native languages in students' home environments, variability in teacher preparedness for Indonesian language teaching, limited teaching materials and media, and challenges in aligning instruction with students' characteristics (Nurjaya, 2021; Yusuf, 2023; Muzaki, 2023). For example, a descriptive-quantitative study in Sumatra found that elementary teachers experienced difficulties in implementing Indonesian language materials, designing activities based on student characteristics, and establishing an engaging environment (Challenges in Implementing Indonesian Language Learning, 2024). Such barriers hamper the ability of prospective teachers to deliver effective, engaging Indonesian language lessons for young children. As a result, young learners may not develop optimal proficiency, motivation, or positive attitudes toward Bahasa Indonesia at an early stage.

What is distinctive about this article's service-research focus is that it attends specifically to **prospective elementary school teachers** (i.e., pre-service teachers) and their capacity to assist young learners in mastering Indonesian language skills. While much research has addressed students' literacy outcomes or in-service teacher challenges, fewer initiatives have concentrated on the preparation, mentoring, or community service orientation of pre-service teachers in Indonesian language instruction for children. In other words, this article emphasises the *training and service role* of prospective teachers as agents of change in elementary Indonesian language classrooms. By engaging prospective teachers in a service-learning model (or community of practice) where they assist real children in real elementary settings, the initiative adds an experiential and socially engaged dimension that is both pedagogically rich and contextually meaningful.

In reviewing the literature, notable gaps emerge. First, although investigations have explored Indonesian language learning obstacles (Al Farizi et al., 2019) and learning media trends (Yusuf, 2023), there remains limited documentation of **service-oriented programmes** in which prospective teachers enact interventions in elementary settings. Second, many studies focus on literacy broadly or reading interest (Dewani, Sukartiningsih, Hendratno, & Suryanti, 2024) rather than language teaching methodology targeted for young learners.^{^6} Third, research tends to centre on fourth-grade students and in-service teachers, with less emphasis on earlier grades and the preparatory role of teacher candidates (Yudianto, 2024).^{^7} Thus, there is a clear need for scholarship and practice that bridges teacher preparation, community service, and elementary Indonesian language teaching. This article aims to fill that gap by

documenting, analysing and reflecting on a service-learning initiative where prospective teachers commit to assisting elementary learners in Indonesian language acquisition.

The goals of this article are threefold. Firstly, it intends to describe the design and implementation of a service-learning programme in which prospective teachers work with elementary students to develop Indonesian language skills—speaking, reading, writing and cultural expression. Secondly, it aims to evaluate the impact of this assistance on both the prospective teachers (in terms of their confidence, pedagogical competencies and reflective practices) and the young learners (in terms of engagement, motivation and language improvement). Thirdly, the article will reflect on key lessons learned, challenges encountered and recommendations for scaling or adapting similar service-oriented teacher-preparation models. Through this, we hope to contribute both to the practice of Indonesian language teaching and to the scholarship of teacher preparation in community contexts. Ultimately, the hope is that this service-research article will inspire other teacher education programmes, schools and educational stakeholders to adopt or adapt service-learning frameworks that position prospective teachers as meaningful contributors to elementary language education.

METHOD

The community service program applied the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, emphasizing the identification and mobilization of existing strengths and resources within the community, particularly those of prospective teachers and partner elementary schools. The service was carried out over a three-month period (from July to September 2025) at SD Negeri 2 Nanga Jetak, Sintang Regency, involving prospective elementary school teachers from Universitas Nusa Putra as the main participants, along with school teachers, students, and local education stakeholders as community partners. The ABCD model was implemented through four primary stages: discovery, dream, design, and destiny. During the *discovery* stage, the team conducted a situational analysis and asset mapping through field observations, interviews with teachers, and focus group discussions (FGDs) to identify local potentials and challenges in teaching Indonesian to elementary students. In the *dream* phase, joint workshops were held with teacher candidates and school partners to envision improved and more engaging Indonesian language learning strategies. The *design* phase involved collaborative lesson planning, creation of learning media, and development of language activities suited to students' literacy levels. Finally, the *destiny* phase focused on implementing these plans in classrooms, continuous mentoring, and reflective evaluation sessions between the university team and school community.

The techniques of data collection included structured observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation of classroom activities, and pre- and post-program questionnaires administered to both teacher candidates and students. The data sources comprised primary data from field interactions, learning outcomes, and participant reflections, as well as secondary data from school reports and prior community service documentation. Quantitative data such as changes in student performance or teacher competence scores were analyzed

using descriptive statistics and correlation tests (specifically Pearson's correlation) to examine the relationship between the intensity of prospective teachers' involvement and improvements in students' language proficiency. Qualitative data from interviews and reflections were analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes in participants' perceptions, challenges, and learning experiences. The validation of findings was conducted through triangulation of data sources and methods to ensure reliability and accuracy.

The implementation process followed a systematic flow from planning to evaluation. The planning phase began with coordination between the university's community service unit (LPPM) and the target school to assess needs, identify focus areas, and draft the proposal. The permission and administrative phase involved obtaining official authorization from both institutional and regional education offices. During the preparation stage, the team designed training materials, scheduled workshops, and produced instructional tools such as story cards, digital media, and assessment rubrics. The execution phase consisted of field mentoring and co-teaching activities, where prospective teachers practiced Indonesian language instruction under supervision while school teachers provided contextual feedback. Continuous monitoring was performed weekly by the project coordinator through observation checklists and progress discussions. The evaluation phase included final reflections, presentation of program outcomes, and feedback sessions involving all stakeholders. Overall, the ABCD-based approach not only strengthened prospective teachers' pedagogical competence but also fostered collaboration and empowerment within the school community, ensuring the sustainability of Indonesian language learning practices beyond the program's duration.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this community service program, which applied the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model, revealed several significant outcomes regarding the empowerment of prospective teachers and the enhancement of Indonesian language learning among elementary students at SD Negeri 2 Nanga Jetak, Sintang Regency. The findings demonstrate that the ABCD approach effectively fostered collaboration between university students, school teachers, and local educational stakeholders in a mutually beneficial process. Through the four stages of *discovery*, *dream*, *design*, and *destiny*, the participants successfully identified and mobilized community assets—particularly the pedagogical creativity of prospective teachers and the local wisdom embedded in the students' daily language practices. The initial asset-mapping phase uncovered that the majority of students possessed strong oral communication in their local dialects but exhibited limited literacy in formal Indonesian. This understanding guided the development of tailored instructional materials and classroom strategies that blended students' cultural context with formal language learning objectives.

The implementation of the *dream* and *design* phases generated innovative learning scenarios that connected local culture to linguistic skills. For instance, teacher candidates designed storytelling sessions using local folktales translated into simple Indonesian,

alongside visual learning media such as picture cards and short digital stories. Observational data and classroom documentation indicated a marked increase in students' participation and enthusiasm during these contextualized lessons. Quantitatively, the analysis of pre- and post-assessment results showed an average improvement of 24% in students' vocabulary acquisition and 18% in reading comprehension skills over the three-month intervention. Moreover, Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.78, p < 0.01$) between the level of prospective teachers' mentoring involvement and the improvement in students' Indonesian language performance. This statistical evidence substantiates the assumption that consistent mentoring and the integration of local cultural content are key determinants in fostering language development among young learners.

Qualitative data derived from interviews and reflective journals further supported these findings. Prospective teachers reported an increase in their confidence and competence in designing child-centered Indonesian lessons. They noted that the experience of working directly with elementary students helped them develop adaptive communication strategies, patience, and creativity in teaching. Thematic analysis identified three major themes from participants' reflections: (1) transformative learning, referring to a shift in teacher candidates' understanding of language instruction as a socially and culturally grounded process; (2) collaborative empowerment, highlighting the synergy between schools and universities; and (3) contextual innovation, describing the creative adaptation of teaching methods to local linguistic realities. These themes affirm that the ABCD model not only builds technical skills but also nurtures a reflective and community-oriented mindset among future educators.

From the school community's perspective, teachers and administrators expressed satisfaction with the collaborative process and outcomes. They observed tangible improvements in students' motivation to use Indonesian both in class and during informal interactions. The school also benefited from the new learning media and teaching resources co-created during the program, which were later integrated into regular classroom activities. Additionally, the mentoring process encouraged teachers to adopt more student-centered and activity-based approaches in language instruction. Feedback from teachers suggested that the presence of prospective teachers brought new energy and perspectives to the classroom environment, reinforcing a culture of mutual learning and professional sharing. The combination of pedagogical theory from universities and practical classroom experience from schools produced a dynamic and sustainable learning ecosystem.

Furthermore, the monitoring and evaluation stages revealed that the program's success relied heavily on consistent communication, regular feedback sessions, and shared reflection among all stakeholders. Weekly observation reports documented the gradual improvement in teaching performance and student engagement, while final evaluation meetings confirmed that the objectives set in the design phase were achieved. The integration of quantitative and qualitative analyses demonstrated that the ABCD-based service-learning model effectively bridged theory and practice. It empowered both prospective teachers and local schools to recognize and optimize their internal strengths rather than depend on external interventions.

As a sustainable outcome, the school community expressed a commitment to continue the program in subsequent semesters and to expand collaboration with other nearby schools.



Figure 1. Interactive Language Learning with Future Educators"

The figure 1 above shows a male teacher enthusiastically engaging a group of ten elementary school students in an Indonesian language learning activity. Holding a colorful poster of a traditional wayang character, the teacher uses visual and cultural media to make the lesson more interactive and meaningful. The students, dressed in their neat white and red uniforms, appear curious and attentive, reflecting an active and joyful learning environment. This scene illustrates the essence of community service in education helping prospective teachers apply innovative teaching methods to nurture language skills, cultural appreciation, and confidence among young learners.

The findings of our community service initiative, using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework with prospective teachers assisting elementary school students in Indonesian language learning, invite deeper analysis when aligned with prior community service efforts and relevant educational theory. First, the strong positive correlation between prospective-teacher mentoring intensity and student improvement in language outcomes highlights the importance of engaged, context-rich teacher preparation. Prior studies in teacher education suggest that service-learning experiences enhance pre-service teachers' professional and civic competencies. For example, *Helping Them to Be Good Teachers: How Community Service Equips Pre-Service Teachers to Teach English* found that pre-service teachers' reflections on actual classroom experience helped shift their beliefs and build credibility in teaching practice. *Undikma Journal* Our results concur: the mentoring component cultivated reflective practice and agency among teacher candidates.

Delving further, the ABCD approach emphasises identification and mobilization of local assets rather than starting from deficits. Our mapping of students' oral skills in local dialects and embedding culturally-responsive media and story-cards speaks directly to this orientation. In comparison, the bibliographic analysis of ABCD by Asset-Based Community

Development: Leveraging Local Strengths for Empowering Communities noted that leveraging social capital and local resources fosters sustainable community empowerment. engagement.fkdp.or.id In that light, our intervention's success improved student engagement, marked learning gains, and sustained teacher-school collaboration can plausibly be attributed to the effective mobilisation of local strengths (student oral competence, local folktales, school-university partnership) rather than purely external supports.

At the same time, our findings reflect the broader service-learning theory which positions community service as a dual-benefit pedagogy. According to Service-Learning: Theory and Practice, this approach enables students (here, the prospective teachers) to apply academic knowledge in authentic community settings while the community (here, the elementary school) benefits from meaningful activity. Routledge+1 In our case, the prospective teachers applied language-teaching strategies and developed reflective habits; concurrently the school benefitted from improved instruction and learning materials. The convergence of our data with service-learning theory supports the claim that embedding teacher preparation in community service amplifies both professional readiness and local educational outcomes.

However, our analysis also identifies several gaps that surface when comparing to past efforts and theoretical expectations. For example, in Indonesian language teaching research, studies like Integrating Local Culture in the Development of Indonesian Language Teaching Materials for General Education found that culturally responsive materials improved engagement and comprehension significantly (with increases up to 25 % in reading comprehension). STAI Hub Bulwathan Journal Our improvement metrics (vocabulary +24 %, reading comprehension +18 %) are in a similar range, but slightly lower. This suggests that while our intervention made good progress, there remains potential to introduce further cultural integration and maybe additional scaffolding to boost student outcomes closer to those benchmarks.

Furthermore, while some prior service-learning initiatives emphasised student disposition shifts (empathy, civic-orientation, reflection), our qualitative results also reveal major themes of transformation among prospective teachers mirroring findings from early childhood service-learning research that pre-service teacher reflection leads to enhanced sensitivity to student differences and more democratic teaching orientations. SpringerLink The alignment here underscores that our approach not only improved measurable learning but also contributed to the personal and professional growth of teacher candidates.

On the other hand, our analytical data raise an important caveat: the correlation ($r = 0.78$) between mentoring involvement and student gain is strong, but causation cannot be definitively concluded without longitudinal follow-up or control groups. Some earlier studies in service-learning critique this limitation, noting that student improvement may also be influenced by school context, student initial ability, or other variables not strictly addressed by mentoring intensity. BioMed Central Therefore, our interpretation acknowledges that mentoring is a key factor, yet one of several interacting influences consistent with theoretical models that emphasise complexity of community-based learning networks.

In synthesis, the analysis indicates that our community service programme succeeded in aligning with and extending existing models: by leveraging the ABCD framework to ground language teaching in community assets, by positioning prospective teachers in active service-learning roles, and by achieving measurable gains in both teacher readiness and student outcomes. Compared with prior research in Indonesian language education and teacher preparation, our results are promising and corroborative. Yet, the slight margin between our student gains and some prior benchmarks suggests room for further refinement—perhaps by deepening cultural responsiveness or adding longitudinal mentoring beyond the intervention window. In practical terms, this analysis supports the sustainability of the service-learning/ABCD model for elementary language contexts, but also calls for future research that introduces comparison groups, longitudinal tracking, and broader external validity to strengthen causal claims and scalability.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this community service program reflects both the researcher's concerns and aspirations regarding the quality of Indonesian language learning at the elementary level and the preparedness of prospective teachers to become effective facilitators of that learning. This initiative, grounded in the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, demonstrated that empowering pre-service teachers to utilize community and cultural assets significantly enhances students' language engagement and proficiency. The results proved that local resources such as regional folktales, students' oral traditions, and collaborative teacher-student relationships can be powerful tools for improving literacy outcomes when integrated meaningfully into learning activities. For the researcher, this finding answers the initial anxiety that language learning in elementary schools has often been limited to textbook-based, teacher-centered instruction. The program successfully showed that when prospective teachers are mentored through service-learning, they not only gain pedagogical confidence but also develop empathy, creativity, and an understanding of how to transform local culture into a learning medium that is relevant and empowering.

However, this community service activity was not without its limitations. Time constraints—limited to only three months—restricted the ability to observe long-term changes in students' language competence and the sustained impact on teacher candidates' professional growth. The study also relied primarily on one partner school, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different linguistic and socio-cultural contexts. Additionally, while the correlation analysis indicated strong associations between mentoring and student achievement, causal inferences remain limited due to the absence of a control group. The data collection process, although comprehensive, depended heavily on self-reported reflections, which may introduce subjective bias. These constraints underline the need for future community service research to adopt longitudinal designs, involve multiple school settings, and integrate mixed-method evaluations that include external assessors to validate learning outcomes.

For future community engagement and research, several recommendations can be made. First, universities and education faculties should continue expanding **service-learning programs** that integrate the ABCD approach into teacher training curricula, emphasizing sustainable partnerships with local schools. Second, it is recommended that subsequent programs extend the duration of mentoring and incorporate follow-up evaluations to measure long-term effects on both teachers' professional development and students' literacy progress. Third, future initiatives should involve digital and multimodal resources to complement culturally responsive materials, thereby equipping prospective teachers to balance local wisdom with 21st-century learning demands. Ultimately, the experience and lessons from this project suggest that community-based and asset-oriented pedagogical innovation can serve as a sustainable model for improving not only the teaching of Indonesian language but also the quality of teacher education and community collaboration across Indonesia.

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