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Community service in language education: English for laundry workers

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Abstract--This community service program aims to improve the English communication skills of laundry workers to support their professional performance and customer service quality. Many laundry staff face challenges in interacting with foreign customers due to limited English proficiency, which may affect service satisfaction and business opportunities. The program was designed as practical English training with a focus on daily expressions, vocabulary related to laundry services, and simple conversation skills. The training methods included interactive activities, role-plays, and dialogues that reflect real workplace situations. Participants showed increased confidence in using English, particularly in greeting customers, explaining services, and handling basic transactions. The program highlights the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in vocational contexts and demonstrates how language education through community service can empower workers, enhance service quality, and contribute to local economic development.

Keywords--Community service, English teaching, Education.



I. Introduction

In the era of globalization, English has become an essential tool of communication in various sectors, including small-scale service industries. One such industry is the laundry business, which often interacts with both local and international customers. Effective communication plays a crucial role in delivering quality service, building customer trust, and expanding business opportunities. However, many laundry workers face challenges in providing satisfactory service to foreign customers due to their limited English proficiency. This language barrier not only affects customer experience but also limits the potential for business growth. Community service programs in language education provide an opportunity to address this issue by equipping workers with practical English skills tailored to their professional needs. Unlike general English courses, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emphasizes functional language use in real workplace contexts, making it highly relevant for laundry staff. Through targeted training, laundry workers can learn essential vocabulary, expressions, and conversational skills that directly support their daily tasks, such as greeting customers, explaining services, handling requests, and managing basic transactions. This paper presents a community service program focused on teaching English to laundry workers. The program aims to empower participants by improving their communication skills, enhancing the quality of customer service, and supporting the competitiveness of small businesses in the service sector (Youniss et al., 1999).

Globalization has brought significant changes in many aspects of life, including the service industry. In Indonesia, the laundry business has developed rapidly, especially in urban areas and regions with high mobility, such as campuses, offices, and tourist destinations. Along with this growth, the ability of laundry staff to communicate effectively with customers has become increasingly important. Many laundry services are not only serving local customers but also foreign visitors, expatriates, and international students. In such contexts, English proficiency becomes a valuable skill that supports service quality and customer satisfaction. Despite its importance, English remains a challenge for many laundry workers. Most of them have not received a formal English education or only possess basic knowledge that is not directly applicable in their work environment. As a result, they often experience difficulties in simple communication tasks, such as greeting customers, explaining available services, giving price information, or responding to complaints. This communication barrier may lead to misunderstandings, reduced customer trust, and even loss of business opportunities. Community service activities in the field of language education offer a practical solution to this problem (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017). By designing English training tailored to the needs of laundry workers, the program not only teaches general language skills but also emphasizes English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP is an approach that focuses on functional language use in specific professional contexts. In this case, laundry staff are trained with vocabulary, expressions, and dialogues relevant to their daily work. Learning is carried out using communicative methods, such as role-play, simulations, and interactive activities, to ensure that participants can directly apply what they have learned in real situations.

The significance of this program lies not only in improving the communication skills of laundry staff but also in empowering workers at the grassroots level. Enhanced English ability contributes to better service quality, increased customer satisfaction, and stronger competitiveness of small businesses. Furthermore, this initiative demonstrates how community service in higher education can directly impact local communities by bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical needs in society. Therefore, this article discusses the implementation of a community service program in language education, with a focus on teaching English to laundry workers. It elaborates on the background, training design, methods, outcomes, and implications of the program as a contribution to the development of vocational English and community empowerment (Li & Flowerdew, 2020).

II. Method

This community service program was designed using a participatory training approach, emphasizing active involvement of the laundry staff throughout the learning process. The method focused on the practical application of English in real workplace contexts, consistent with the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

1. Participants

The participants were laundry workers from small and medium-sized laundry businesses located in the target area. Most of them had limited formal education in English and relied primarily on daily practice in customer service. A total of [insert number] participants joined the program, consisting of both male and female workers.

2. Needs Analysis

Before the training was conducted, a needs analysis was carried out through informal interviews and observations at several laundry shops. The purpose was to identify specific communication challenges faced by the workers, such as greeting customers, explaining services, providing price information, and handling customer complaints. The results of this analysis became the basis for designing the training materials.

3. Training Design

The program was structured into several sessions, each focusing on practical language use. The main topics included:

- a. Basic greetings and customer interactions
- b. Vocabulary related to laundry services (washing, ironing, delivery, payment, etc.)
- c. Asking and answering customer questions
- d. Handling complaints politely
- e. Simple transactional English (prices, time estimation, and payment methods)

4. Implementation

Training sessions were delivered over [insert duration, e.g., four weeks with weekly meetings]. Each session lasted approximately [insert duration, e.g., 90 minutes] and used interactive methods such as:

- a. **Role-play and simulation** of real customer service situations
- b. **Dialogues and pair work** to practice vocabulary and expressions

- c. **Visual aids and handouts** containing practical phrases
- d. **Group discussions** to reflect on experiences and challenges in applying English

5. Evaluation

The evaluation of the program was conducted in two stages:

- a. **Formative evaluation:** observation during training to monitor participation, engagement, and progress in speaking.
- b. **Summative evaluation:** simple oral and written tests at the end of the program, combined with feedback from participants regarding the usefulness of the training.

The data collected from observations, interviews, and evaluation tests were then analyzed descriptively to determine the effectiveness of the training in improving the participants' English communication skills.

III. Discussion

Community service in the field of language education plays an important role in bridging the gap between academic knowledge and the real needs of society. One practical example is the implementation of an English language program specifically designed for laundry workers. This group is often in direct contact with foreign customers, particularly in tourism areas, yet they frequently lack sufficient English skills to communicate effectively. The program highlights the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as it focuses on language use that is directly relevant to the workers' daily tasks. Rather than teaching general English, the learning materials are tailored to common workplace situations such as greeting customers, explaining services, discussing prices, handling complaints, and confirming orders. This approach ensures that the language learned can be immediately applied in real-life interactions.

From the perspective of community empowerment, the program fosters self-confidence and professionalism among laundry workers. With improved communication skills, workers are better able to provide clear information, build trust with customers, and offer quality service. This not only benefits the workers personally but also contributes to the broader image of hospitality in the community. Furthermore, the project illustrates the reciprocal benefits of community service. While the workers gain practical English competence, educators and student-teachers also develop valuable skills in curriculum design, material adaptation, and community engagement. It creates a meaningful exchange where both parties learn and grow. In summary, community service in the form of English education for laundry workers demonstrates how language teaching can be directly relevant to people's livelihoods. It reflects the role of language educators in empowering local communities, addressing workplace needs, and contributing to social and economic development.

Expanded Discussion

Community service in language education is not only about teaching English but also about responding to real community needs. The program "English for Laundry Workers" demonstrates how English language education can be adapted

to support specific sectors of society that are often overlooked in formal educational contexts.

1. Relevance through English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

The approach aligns with the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where teaching focuses on learners' professional needs. Laundry workers, especially in tourism-oriented areas, frequently encounter foreign customers who expect clear communication about services. Standard general English classes may not fully meet their requirements; instead, they need functional language such as:

- a. Phrases for greeting and welcoming customers.
- b. Vocabulary for laundry items, stains, and fabrics.
- c. Sentences for explaining service options (e.g., wash and fold, ironing, express service).
- d. Expressions for discussing prices, payments, and delivery times.
- e. Polite ways to handle customer complaints.

By teaching practical and job-related language, the program ensures immediate application and increases the motivation of participants.

2. Empowerment and Professional Development

Community service in this context also emphasizes empowerment. Many laundry workers may have limited formal education or lack confidence in using English. When they acquire even basic communication skills, they gain:

- a. Confidence in interacting with foreigners.
- b. Professional identity as service providers who can communicate effectively.
- c. Improved customer satisfaction, which can lead to stronger customer loyalty and business growth.

Thus, English language education becomes a tool not only for communication but also for personal and economic development.

3. Service-Learning and Mutual Benefits

This initiative reflects the principles of service-learning, where educators and student-teachers connect academic knowledge with community service. The mutual benefits include:

- a. For workers: Practical English competence and confidence.
- b. For educators and students: Real-world teaching experience, adaptation of materials, and understanding of social responsibility.

This creates a reciprocal relationship where both the community and the academic institution benefit.

4. Social and Economic Impact

Language education projects like this contribute to broader social outcomes. Laundry workers with English skills help improve the quality of local services, strengthening the tourism sector. At the same time, the workers' enhanced communication skills can lead to greater job stability and opportunities for entrepreneurship. In this way, a small-scale English program has ripple effects on the local economy and community well-being.

5. Challenges and Sustainability

Despite its benefits, such programs may face challenges:

- a. Irregular working hours of laundry workers make scheduling difficult.
- b. Limited resources (materials, funding, or training space).
- c. Need for continuity, since short-term training may not be enough to sustain language proficiency.

Addressing these issues requires collaboration between educators, local businesses, and possibly government or NGO support to ensure sustainability. English for Laundry Workers as a community service program illustrates how language education can be practical, empowering, and socially meaningful. It connects classroom knowledge with community needs, fosters mutual growth, and contributes to the broader development of society.



Picture 1. The students were practicing the reading and speaking exercise

The implementation of English language education for laundry workers plays an important role in enhancing both their communication skills and service quality. Laundry workers often interact with foreign customers, especially in tourist areas, yet many of them face difficulties in expressing simple sentences, understanding instructions, or handling customer requests in English. By providing targeted community service programs, such as English for Laundry Workers, participants are trained with practical vocabulary and expressions related to their daily tasks, including greetings, asking about laundry preferences, explaining prices, and giving time estimates. This program not only empowers workers with confidence in customer service but also supports the local economy by improving professionalism in small-scale businesses. Furthermore, the training fosters awareness that language learning can be accessible and useful in everyday work, thus motivating workers to continuously practice and expand their skills.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, community service through English education for laundry workers provides meaningful benefits for both individuals and society. The program equips workers with practical language skills that directly support their daily communication with customers, especially in areas with high tourist activity. Beyond improving service quality and customer satisfaction, this initiative also fosters self-confidence, professional growth, and economic opportunities for the participants. Therefore, English for Laundry Workers demonstrates how language education can be designed to meet specific community needs, making learning more relevant, accessible, and impactful. The community service program of English for Laundry Workers highlights the importance of providing language education that is directly relevant to people's professions and daily lives. Laundry workers, who frequently encounter foreign customers, often face communication barriers that can affect the quality of their service. Through this program, they are able to learn functional English expressions such as greetings, giving explanations about prices and services, confirming customer requests, and handling complaints politely. These skills not only improve their ability to serve customers but also build their confidence and sense of professionalism. On a broader scale, the program contributes to community development by supporting small businesses, enhancing customer satisfaction, and strengthening the local economy in areas where tourism plays a significant role. Thus, English for Laundry Workers serves as an example of how language education, when tailored to specific needs, can empower individuals, promote lifelong learning, and bring tangible social and economic benefits to the wider community.

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