

## ENHANCING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH FABLES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Hariyono<sup>1</sup>, Firdausy Alya Hasana<sup>1</sup>, Yoshua Veron Handika Putra Siadari<sup>1</sup>, Dwi Ainur Riza<sup>1</sup>,  
Anindya Thalita Salsabila<sup>1</sup>, Rommel Utungga Pasopati<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Indonesia

\*Correspondence E-mail: [rommel@unitomo.ac.id](mailto:rommel@unitomo.ac.id)

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### Abstract

This article describes the community service initiative that students and faculty members from Universitas Dr. Soetomo carried out for the SDN Kapasari I elementary school children to enhance their reading comprehension skills. The primary aim of this community service project is to enhance reading habits, including reading comprehension as well. This community service is executed through an initial evaluation, service provision, and assessment. This study employs documentation as its approach. Approximately fifty students from SDN Kapasari I participated in the event, which was successfully concluded. They are urged to read the designated fables both out loud and quietly. The main objective is to encourage students to cultivate reading habits to enhance their knowledge of literary pieces. In summary, this community project enables primary school students to enhance their comprehension of English literature and increases their self-assurance when speaking publicly. The implication is intended to widen students' perspectives of knowledge regarding reading materials through its reading comprehension.

### Kata Kunci:

Keterampilan  
Membaca,  
Dogeng,  
Sekolah Dasar.

### Abstrak

Artikel ini menguraikan inisiatif pengabdian masyarakat yang dilakukan oleh mahasiswa dan staf pengajar dari Universitas Dr. Soetomo untuk anak-anak SDN Kapasari I guna meningkatkan keterampilan membaca mereka. Tujuan utama dari proyek pengabdian masyarakat ini adalah untuk meningkatkan kebiasaan membaca, termasuk pemahaman bacaan. Pengabdian masyarakat ini dilaksanakan melalui pendahuluan, pelaksanaan kegiatan, dan evaluasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan dokumentasi sebagai pendekatannya. Sekitar lima puluh siswa dari SDN Kapasari I berpartisipasi dalam acara tersebut. Mereka didorong untuk membaca fabel yang ditentukan baik dengan suara nyaring maupun pelan. Tujuan utamanya adalah untuk mendorong siswa menumbuhkan kebiasaan membaca guna meningkatkan pengetahuan mereka tentang karya sastra. Singkatnya, pengabdian ini memungkinkan siswa SD untuk meningkatkan pemahaman tentang Sastra Inggris dan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri mereka saat berbicara di depan umum. Tujuan yang diharapkan kemudian adalah perluasan pengetahuan para murid melalui keterampilan membaca.

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## INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental indicator of language proficiency, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia. It goes beyond the mere act of decoding words and involves a complex mental process of understanding written or printed texts. Reading entails interpreting written symbols to construct meaning, ranging from simple word recognition to advanced comprehension of texts [1], [2], [3]. It includes both silent and oral reading, aiming not only to articulate the text but also to grasp its meaning in a sequential and structured manner. Therefore, reading serves as a foundational skill in acquiring language, especially within academic and social contexts.

A core aspect of reading is reading comprehension, which refers to an individual's ability to understand and interpret the meaning of a text [4], [5], [6]. Reading comprehension is not limited to recognizing words or sentences; rather, it involves the active construction of meaning through interaction with the text, the application of prior knowledge, and personal interpretation. It also includes the ability to interpret the writer's message, understand the context, and connect ideas presented within the text [7], [8], [9]. As such, reading is an active cognitive process that demands full engagement from the reader through questioning, predicting, and making inferences. This ability is essential in enhancing literacy and critical thinking, particularly in elementary education settings.

In the field of education, reading skills can be developed not only through formal classroom instruction but also through community service activities organized by higher education institutions. These community engagement initiatives aim to cultivate consistent reading habits and enhance reading comprehension among learners, thereby contributing to the improvement of students' literacy skills [10], [11], [12]. One such initiative was carried out by lecturers and students of Universitas Dr. Soetomo (UNITOMO) Surabaya, targeting the students of SDN Kapasari I Surabaya. This primary school is in the northern part of Surabaya, specifically at Jl. Pecindilan II No. 43, Surabaya.

The primary focus of this community service program was to improve students' English reading skills through a text-based approach using short fable stories in English. Each student was encouraged to read the assigned texts independently and subsequently read them aloud to their peers or teachers. This method not only aims to improve students' pronunciation and reading fluency but also to build a daily reading habit that is enjoyable and meaningful. Through this activity, students are expected to develop greater interest in reading and gradually improve their English comprehension skills in a structured and supportive learning environment.

## IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This community service program was implemented using a structured approach consisting of three main stages: needs assessment, program implementation, and monitoring and evaluation [13], [14]. The entire process was framed within a participatory and collaborative model, involving direct engagement with the target school community particularly the school principal, teachers, and students at SDN Kapasari I Surabaya.

### A. Needs Assessment and Planning

In the initial stage, the community service team conducted a preliminary needs assessment through in-depth discussions and interviews with the school principal. This phase aimed to identify the specific challenges faced by the school in delivering effective English language instruction, particularly in improving students' reading habits and comprehension skills. The findings indicated a strong need for alternative and engaging strategies in teaching English, especially for lower-grade students who tend to struggle

with motivation and text comprehension [15].

Based on this evaluation, the team designed a targeted action plan, which included clearly defined objectives, expected outcomes, and the selection of appropriate materials and methods. The chosen approach focused on the use of English fable stories as engaging literary resources to promote reading comprehension. Fables were selected due to their simple structure, moral values, and appeal to young learners, making them highly suitable for early-stage English reading activities.

#### **B. Program Implementation**

The implementation phase involved a series of interactive reading sessions conducted by UNITOMO lecturers and students together with the pupils of SDN Kapasari I. These sessions took place in the school's classrooms and were designed to encourage both silent reading and oral reading practices. Students were first asked to read the selected fable stories individually, followed by group reading activities where they took turns reading aloud and discussing the storyline and moral lessons.

To promote student engagement, the sessions incorporated collaborative learning elements, where college students acted as reading companions or mentors, providing pronunciation support, vocabulary assistance, and simple comprehension checks. This format was intended to foster a relaxed and enjoyable reading environment, in which students felt motivated and confident in their English language learning.

#### **C. Monitoring and Evaluation**

Following the implementation, a structured monitoring and evaluation process was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the program. Observation, informal interviews with teachers and students, and post-activity reflections were used to gather feedback. The results showed a positive impact, with students demonstrating increased enthusiasm and willingness to engage in English reading activities. Teachers also reported noticeable improvements in students' reading confidence and interest in exploring more English texts [16].

Furthermore, the school principal acknowledged the relevance and practicality of the program, recommending its continuation and suggesting regular integration of similar reading initiatives into the school's curriculum. The feedback indicated a growing awareness of the need for contextual and student-centered English learning methods, particularly those that promote comprehension and critical thinking from an early age.

#### **D. Research and Documentation Approach**

This article was compiled using a qualitative documentation method [15], [16]. Data were collected through field observations, informal interviews, photographs, and documentation of the implementation process. All collected data were then categorized into thematic sections aligned with the phases of the community service activities. A content analysis approach was applied to interpret the findings and underline the significance of reading comprehension as a key component in early English education. The qualitative analysis highlights not only the effectiveness of the approach but also the potential for replication in similar educational contexts.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **A. Reading Comprehension and Its Enhancements**

Reading comprehension refers to the cognitive ability to construct meaning from written texts. It involves more than recognizing individual words or sentences; it requires understanding the context, interpreting ideas, and identifying relationships within the text.

Strong reading comprehension skills enable learners to read effectively, absorb information efficiently, solve problems, plan strategies, understand abstract concepts, and engage in meaningful discussions about the content [17], [18], [19]. Therefore, reading is not simply a process of decoding language it is a comprehensive method of making sense of written discourse. It functions like unraveling threads within a complex fabric, where readers follow the narrative, interpret meanings, and actively engage with possible implications both before and after reading.



Figure 1 and 2. Elementary students participating in fable reading activities, and UNITOMO students facilitating reading sessions with elementary school students

In general, reading comprehension encompasses at least two key aspects: skimming and scanning, and intensive and extensive reading [1], [2], [3]. The first technique, skimming and scanning, involves quickly navigating through a text to identify essential ideas or locate specific information. Skimming is typically used to grasp the general meaning or structure of a passage, while scanning targets particular details such as names, dates, or keywords. Although this process requires minimal reading time, it remains effective for efficiently identifying the main points of a text.

The second aspect relates to intensive and extensive reading, both of which are essential for deeper comprehension. Intensive reading refers to a focused and detailed examination of a single text, emphasizing full understanding of vocabulary, syntax, and meaning. In contrast, extensive reading involves engaging with a wide range of texts to develop fluency, broaden vocabulary, and cultivate a general sense of language patterns. These two approaches encourage learners to read with clear objectives and deliberate strategies, fostering more meaningful and long-lasting comprehension [20], [21], [22]. When applied effectively, these techniques allow readers to relate new information to their prior knowledge and to internalize concepts more thoroughly.





Figure 3. Elementary Students and a UNITOMO Student

### B. Discussing Reading Fables

Approaches to improving reading comprehension should extend beyond viewing literature merely as a source of entertainment. Instead, they should be purpose-driven, emphasizing specific learning objectives that align with the learner's cognitive and affective goals. When reading activities are guided by a clear intention, such as acquiring knowledge or drawing moral lessons, students are more likely to engage actively with the text. This approach also facilitates deeper reflection, allowing learners to revisit the material and connect new information to their existing knowledge and experiences [20], [21], [22].

One effective strategy begins with analyzing the text using the 5W + 1H framework: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. This initial analysis enables learners to comprehend narrative structure, character roles, and causal relationships within the story. As they progress, students can derive new insights and interpretations, recognizing the unique features of one text in comparison with others. Ultimately, reading comprehension becomes a process of linking personal interests, prior knowledge, and textual information in a meaningful and integrated manner.

Reading comprehension is not an innate skill; it must be cultivated through continuous practice and thoughtful guidance. It should be embedded within efforts to foster critical thinking, reflective learning, and knowledge construction. Comprehension deepens when learners engage with a wide variety of texts and begin to produce responses or even create new content inspired by their readings. This reflective process must be ongoing and consistent to be effective [17], [18], [19].

In a literary context, comprehension goes well beyond techniques like skimming or scanning. It involves a close reading of the text, paying attention to narrative tension, literary devices, tone, and structure. Such analysis allows learners to understand not only the storyline, but also the underlying messages, values, and themes embedded within the literature. This deeper engagement with literary elements ultimately strengthens the learner's ability to interpret complex texts and appreciate the richness of written narratives.



Figure 4. Elementary Students and UNITOMO Students Read the Fables Together

Understanding underlying meanings in cultural texts, such as literary works, requires a multilayered approach to reading comprehension. In its expanded perspective, this process encompasses several stages designed to deepen the reader's engagement with the text. One fundamental stage is summarizing, which involves generating a concise yet accurate representation of the main ideas within a text. A well-constructed summary focuses on essential elements—such as characters, settings, plot points, and moral messages—while avoiding extraneous details. The purpose of summarizing is not merely to reduce the text, but to reinforce the reader's ability to identify and synthesize key information.

Closely related to summarizing is the task of paraphrasing. While summarizing focuses on brevity, paraphrasing entails restating the text's content using the reader's own words and structure, maintaining the original meaning. Both strategies aim to ensure that learners are not passively repeating what they read, but instead are processing, internalizing, and reconstructing meaning through their own lens of understanding. These skills promote active comprehension, helping students articulate what they have learned from the literary materials [1], [17], [19].

A third important aspect is understanding the author's intent. This involves interpreting the purpose behind the text—whether to inform, persuade, entertain, or provoke thought. In literary texts, the intent often includes ethical or moral lessons, which may be embedded in characters' actions, narrative outcomes, or symbolic language. By exploring figurative expressions and narrative devices, learners can uncover deeper thematic meanings beyond the surface narrative [1], [2], [3].

The fourth dimension of reading comprehension in literary contexts involves making connections between the fictional content and real-life experiences. Readers are encouraged to relate what they read to their own lives, to other texts they have encountered, or to broader societal and global issues. This process, often referred to as text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections, allows learners to discover additional layers of meaning. For instance, readers may evaluate whether the behaviors, challenges, or moral dilemmas presented in the stories reflect situations they have experienced or observed in their surroundings.

By connecting the internal elements of the text (such as characters and themes) with external realities, students are not only interpreting literature but also contextualizing it within a broader framework of understanding. This comprehensive approach empowers learners to appreciate literature not only as a form of artistic expression, but also as a medium for reflection, personal growth, and social awareness.



Figure 5. Documentation of SDN Kapasari I Students, UNITOMO Students, and a UNITOMO Lecturer after the Event

In fact, similarities in meaning between the reader and the texts can enhance comprehension of the expression and how its meanings are incorporated. The connections are also associated with the fifth problem, which is essential theme recognition [2], [3], [9]. In this way, the reader can organize the literary pieces to draw deeper significance and understand the author's overarching messages. These perspectives enhance the reader/s' comprehension of the book and promote a more intensive dialogue by following the author's perspective furthermore.

### C. Reading Comprehension through Fables in SDN Kapasari I Surabaya

To foster student engagement and improve reading comprehension skills, lecturers and students from Universitas Dr. Soetomo (UNITOMO) Surabaya collaborated with SDN Kapasari I Surabaya in a structured community service initiative. This activity was conducted in the school auditorium and involved approximately fifty elementary students. The program was carried out in multiple sequential stages designed to maximize both participation and learning outcomes.

The first stage involved the distribution of short stories or fables to each student. To support the learners' understanding, the selected fables were presented bilingually—in both Bahasa Indonesia and English. Each student was assigned at least one fable to be read both individually and collaboratively with peers. The collection consisted of five fables authored by A. Filyan (2021), including *Finch and Canary* [23], *The Lion-Skinned Donkey* [24], *The Ostriches and The Cassowaries* [25], *Bees and Ants* [26], and *The Honest Mother Cow* [27]. These stories were selected not only for their entertainment value but also for their potential to enhance students' reading comprehension and critical thinking.





Figure 6. The Discussion Regarding the Fables between Elementary School Students and a UNITOMO Student

The students were then organized into small groups, each consisting of five members and supervised by a UNITOMO community service team representative. This grouping strategy aimed to create a collaborative learning environment, wherein students could support one another in comprehending the texts. Within their groups, students discussed the fables, focusing on interpreting the stories' meanings and learning how to read critically and independently. They were encouraged to read the assigned stories silently, with ongoing support provided by lecturers and student facilitators. This step helped guide students in understanding core themes, vocabulary, and narrative structure.

The silent reading session placed a particular emphasis on identifying and analyzing key literary elements such as characters, plot, setting, tone, conflict, and dialogue. Understanding these elements is essential for building students' analytical reading skills and fostering a deeper appreciation for literature. Moreover, this activity aimed to instill a sustainable reading habit, encouraging students to engage with literary texts both inside and outside of formal classroom settings [11], [21], [22].

During the process, students were further encouraged to make personal connections to the texts. This reflective approach enabled them to explore deeper meanings in the fables and apply the moral lessons to real-life contexts. Furthermore, the collaborative discussion phase provided opportunities for learners to improve their oral communication skills and self-confidence. Many students were able to articulate their interpretations and present their ideas confidently before their peers.

One of the main challenges encountered was students' tendency to become distracted by peers, which often led to playful behavior during the sessions. To address this, facilitators employed positive reinforcement strategies and established that a balance between reading and play could lead to a more enjoyable and productive learning experience [10], [11], [12].

As part of the documentation and reflective practice component of the program, students were recorded while reading the fables aloud. These video recordings served as both an evaluative and promotional tool, providing evidence of student progress while



enhancing their public speaking abilities. Additionally, this audiovisual documentation was intended to increase the visibility and impact of the community service initiative, highlighting the role of creative methods in advancing English language education at the elementary level.

Ultimately, this program underscored that even young learners have the potential to improve their reading comprehension skills through structured literary engagement. The use of culturally relevant, bilingual fables proved effective in motivating students to learn English and develop a more positive attitude toward reading as a lifelong skill.



Figure 7. Two Elementary School Students are Reading Aloud while being Recorded by Wireless Microphones and Smartphones

During the monitoring and evaluation phase, feedback from the students, teachers, and school principal was collected. The main challenge identified was maintaining students' focus during the activity, particularly when they became distracted by peers. To address this, facilitators used positive reinforcement and game-based elements to encourage attention and engagement [10], [11], [12].

Despite minor challenges, the program was successful in promoting reading as an enjoyable and meaningful activity. Students reported increased enthusiasm for reading, and teachers observed improvements in reading fluency and comprehension. The community service demonstrated that even young learners can develop reading comprehension skills when supported with appropriate materials, interactive methods, and collaborative environments.

In conclusion, the use of fables as a medium for teaching reading proved effective. For future implementations, it is recommended to incorporate student-written stories or adapt the materials to reflect students' real-life experiences. Additional components, such as storytelling, dramatization, or public speaking, could further enrich students' English language skills and foster greater confidence in using the language in academic and social contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The community service initiative conducted at SDN Kapasari I Surabaya, which aimed to enhance students' reading comprehension skills, has demonstrated significant effectiveness. The program successfully stimulated students' enthusiasm for reading literary texts, particularly fables,

both in individual settings and during group presentations. One of the primary achievements was the ability of the team to inspire students to develop a genuine interest in reading, fostering not only the habit of silent reading but also the confidence to read aloud in front of others. Despite facing certain challenges particularly in sustaining students' attention and engagement while working with specific reading materials the consistent support and motivation provided by the community service team, including university students and lecturers, played a pivotal role in maintaining students' focus. As a result, many students exhibited increased boldness and willingness to express their curiosity and enthusiasm for learning English. Notably, reading fables became a practical and enjoyable entry point for them to begin building consistent reading habits and language awareness. This community service activity has generated a wide range of benefits for all stakeholders involved. For SDN Kapasari I, the program contributed to the school's literacy enrichment efforts and supported its goal of fostering English proficiency from an early age. For the students, it provided an engaging platform to develop foundational reading comprehension skills, while simultaneously building their self-confidence in using English. For the service team and the English Literature Department at Universitas Dr. Soetomo, the initiative offered valuable experience in applying theoretical knowledge in real-world educational contexts, reinforcing the importance of literacy as a tool for empowerment and social contribution. Looking forward, future iterations of this community service program can incorporate students' personal experiences into the development of new fables. By involving students in co-creating stories based on their everyday lives, the program can foster a deeper sense of ownership, cultural relevance, and creative thinking. Additionally, the integration of public speaking components such as guided storytelling, role-play, and expressive reading can further enhance students' English communication skills and increase their comfort with speaking in front of audiences. In conclusion, this program illustrates that early exposure to literary texts, when combined with interactive methods and supportive mentorship, can significantly boost elementary students' reading comprehension and language confidence. Sustainable literacy interventions like these play a vital role in laying the foundation for lifelong learning and cross-cultural understanding.

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