Foreign Language Mastery Training for International Internship Program Students

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ABSTRACT

This foreign language training is conducted on the social sciences and political sciences department campus at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan (UMTS). Foreign language training with the Altissia platform improves students' foreign language skills. The Altissia platform training method has 25 foreign languages using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) learning method. This foreign language training is used so that students can practice their foreign language skills in preparation for international internships in Asian countries (Malaysia, Singapore) and Europe (England, France, and Germany). Foreign language training with the Altissia platform will determine the ability to write, read, listen, and speak. This language training uses a persuasive method online based on the web, which is applied in the learning process. Before conducting language training, a pre-test is carried out, and after five months of learning, a post-test is carried out. Data collection is carried out based on observations, namely by observing phenomena that occur in the field. The learning training provided to participants includes English training with the Altissia platform method, which involves studying using the platform for at least two hours every day for four days a week. The results from 71 participants, as many as 68 participants, increased their language ability level. Male students are better at English than women

INTRODUCTION

The internship program planned by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan, in 2024 is an international internship abroad such as Malaysia, Singapore, England, France, and Germany. This internship program is one of the implementations of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy from the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (KEMENRISTEK) for students to study outside the campus for one or two semesters outside or abroad, which is also for internships in industries that are partners of the campus. The government provides opportunities for students to study overseas to have the experience of studying and working abroad and improve their soft skills [1]. Students can also learn how to communicate with their friends from different countries on campus.

A good command of a foreign language will also be an added value for prospective workers in the business and industrial worlds. This is because working abroad is the most significant opportunity for a high income [2]. A good command of a foreign language will make it easier for students to find work abroad, which generally requires English language skills in the workplace [3]. There is a lot of demand for workers in Indonesia because our people are the friendliest in the world.

Whatever the government slices, the goal is cultivating the next generation of Indonesian thinkers and researchers. As soon as they graduate, students can put their newfound knowledge to use in the workforce or everyday life. Therefore, Indonesia's youth can propel the country to the level of the most developed nations globally. Students need strong language abilities if Indonesia is to compete on a global scale [4]. Imagine a second world where students wish to study or work overseas but cannot communicate in their native language. Furthermore, you must possess competent foreign language abilities to be considered for direct international study programs [5].

Social and Political Science students of UMTS are expected to be able to study socio-political symptoms and phenomena and then apply political science theories to provide solutions to socio-political problems, both in politics in Indonesia and politics in various countries. Thus, the learning provided by Altissia can help students have soft skills in the form of foreign language skills so that they can do internships or international student exchanges. Foreign language skills are fundamental to helping students improve their knowledge from various perspectives. Language also plays a significant role in enhancing a student's cognitive abilities [6]. It is not surprising that people with multilingualism appear more brilliant.

Problem Analysis

The ability to listen, speak, read, and write is the foundation of effective communication [7]. This is also true in learning English: reading and speaking are productive abilities, whereas listening and reading are receptive skills. Furthermore, pronunciation, vocabulary, and language structure are three aspects of language that significantly contribute to the four abilities [8]. Students need to learn from native speakers to reach their full potential in the English language [8 - 9]. Furthermore, there needs to be a balanced distribution of both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Altissia is one of many language learning apps available in the modern internet age that facilitates learning a new language. You can learn any 25 languages with Altissia, which is available online around the clock.

There are signs that UMTS students need to enhance their English language proficiency, according to the author's rigorous observations made at the start of the semester. Students need help establishing basic language skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing, and most teachers use expressions and directions that are too complex for them to understand. They took two semesters of college-level English classes and six in high school. This phenomenon provides the basis for the author's analysis of students' challenges with English language acquisition, which can be utilized to enhance the quality of instruction during lecturers' community service projects. To help his students prepare for international internships and student exchanges, the dean of UMTS's faculty of social and political sciences organized a socialization activity stressing the significance of learning a foreign language for careers in business and industry, given that many of his students still had trouble communicating effectively in English.

This counseling activity aims to provide initial information about foreign language learning, which can be done anytime and anywhere with Altissia. It also increases soft and foreign language skills so students can intern, work, and participate in international student exchanges. This activity provides information on how to use the Altissia platform as a companion to learn the foreign language they choose. Among the many advantages of volunteering is learning a new language and raising awareness about its significance. This aims to help professors fulfill one of the three dharmas of academia.

METHOD

This socializing and training will occur face-to-face and offline for 71 Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan students. Socialization began in May 2024, and the learning process continued for five months until October 2024. Students can take a post-test after completing 200 hours of learning with the Altissia platform for five months. Counseling methods include lectures, Q&A sessions, and showing the learning platform's results. The training materials have two parts: one covers how to use learning Altissia platforms, and the other details how to implement autonomous learning. Two tests, one administered before the information is presented and one administered after, measure the extent to which participants' understanding of the subject matter has improved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

On Wednesday, May 29, 2024, in the city of Padang Sidempuan, 96 participants, including representatives of the deans from the Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan, participated in the socialization and training of using foreign language learning Altissia in collaboration with PT. Anugrah Rezeki Sejahtera from Jakarta (picture 1).

Picture 1. Presenter and Audience

The event was deemed a success. As evident during the content presentation, the participants were highly engaged in the socialization activity, paying close attention, and taking notes or pictures. The audience was engaged and critical throughout the Q&A session, both in asking and responding to questions, and they wanted to learn more about the topics covered. Because the counseling participants achieved level A with the CEFR level requirements while working on the pre-test questions, there was an improvement in their ability to answer both the pre-and post-test questions. As a group, they achieved an A+ on the post-test. Thus, the speaker's socialization effectively imparts knowledge that pupils can apply.

Picture 2. Dean Faculty of Social and Political Sciences UMTS and Team Altissia.

The Altissia web app proved easily understood by students along their learning journey. Students are more likely to learn on their own and value soft skills, such as English language proficiency, due to this foreign language improvement activity, which has a beneficial effect on campus. Writing, listening, reading, and speaking are the four primary domains of language acquisition that Altissia uses to evaluate proficiency in its interactive methods of foreign language teaching [11].

Table 1 shows that the post-test results indicate increased English language skills. The Altissia language test results are CEFR standard levels, which can be converted to TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC standards.

Table 1. Average English language skills by gender

Gender	Language Skill	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Female 43 students	Writing	-A1	A1
	Listening	A1	A1+
	Reading	A1	A1+
	Speaking	-A1	A1
Male 28 students	Writing	A1+	A1+
	Listening	A1+	-A2
	Reading	-A2	A2
	Speaking	-A1	A1
Total 71 students	Writing	A1	A1
	Listening	A1	A1+
	Reading	A1+	A2
	Speaking	-A1	A1

An internationally accepted standard for expressing language competency, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) analyzes and describes an individual's level of language proficiency. It is the Council of Europe's standardized method of evaluating pupils' linguistic competence. The CEFR levels are A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 [12].

This reference framework, CEFR levels, is divided into six specific levels from A1 to C2, which describe basic to advanced language levels with the following details:

- Breakthrough or Beginner – CEFR A1 will be able to understand and use simple language structures to communicate at a basic level. Be able to introduce yourself and provide basic personal information. And be able to communicate with people who speak slowly and clearly.
- Waystage or Elementary—CEFR A2 will understand common sentences and phrases and be able to communicate about essential topics such as family, shopping, geography, and introducing yourself.
- Threshold or Intermediate—CEFR B1 will be able to understand the gist of texts related to tourism, school, and personal hobbies. They can also write and speak about simple topics such as hobbies, personal experiences, and dreams.
- At the proficient level (Vantage or Upper Intermediate), CEFR B2 students will be able to understand the main content in more complex texts, communicate more fluently with native speakers, and write or speak on various topics.

- Expert level (Effective Operational Proficiency or Advanced)—CEFR C1 will understand long and complex texts and use the language fluently for various purposes.
- Mastery or Proficiency level—CEFR C2 will understand and communicate all topics and information. They can speak naturally and fluently in complex situations and actively participate in academic and professional environments [12].

Table 2 shows data from the College of Europe and Cambridge. Several language education organizations have estimated the time needed to attain a certain level of proficiency in their respective languages [13].

Table 2. CEFR conversion to other value standards

Discussion

According to the post-test results, all pupils must improve their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. No skill test is skipped by either the male or female pupils. Nonetheless, the results reveal that male students' English skills are superior to female students' language skills when comparing the sexes. Among the 71 students who participated in the program, just three reported that their language proficiency remained the same. The average CEFR level is still A2, which is similar to TOEFL (330 - 397), IELTS (2.0 - 3.5), or TOEIC (121 - 225); hence, students' language abilities could be more adequate. This is why it's essential to consider how long the training will last before implementing it.

In line with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology guidelines, the Independent Learning Independent Campus policy emphasizes the importance of possessing soft skills, such as fluency in many languages. The University of Muhammadiyah South Tapanuli's arrangement with the Altissia by the platform as well as other similar agreements with other campuses, including Universitas Prima Indonesia, Panca Budi Development University, Medan Area University, Santo Thomas Catholic University of North Sumatra, and Haji Medan University who have used the platform [12 - 13].

Based on the post-test findings, every student achieved a level A1 in writing. Mastering this skill is challenging, but a few kids make it complex [14]. Learning English involves difficulties with reading and pronunciation due to differences in articulation and comprehension of grammar concerning tenses and words with multiple meanings.

Listening proficiency is the subject of the second post-test outcome with level A1+. Many students struggle to keep up with the natural speech rate of native English speakers when listening to English-language media [16]. Then, even when the speaker is not a native Indonesian speaker or the speed is changed to Indonesian, they still can't understand a word since they don't know enough words and can't decipher English accents [17].

Reading at level A2 produced the best results from students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan. The majority of pupils hold the view that reading is the most fundamental ability. The student's enthusiasm for reading serves as the foundation for their responses. Thus, kids enjoy the activity even though the language of instruction is English. Although there are few, it is crucial to confront the idea that reading is a troublesome talent for students. The data shows that pupils with little vocabulary proficiency need help understanding what they read in English, making it difficult to decipher what they read.

All language teachers can use this as a starting point for discussing how to balance students' reading abilities with the difficulty level of English-language materials. For example, similar to the English language training that has been implemented in the Lembang Bandung village area to boost the region's agrotourism potential, the village government offers training through the Altissia platform so that residents can converse with foreign tourists who visit their gardens by learning the English names of plants and fruits. This facilitates their reading, writing, and communication with visitors from other countries. They can access individualized learning opportunities through the Altissia platform based on agrotourism concepts [18].

According to the post-test results, speaking was at level A1. Students' fear of ridicule from peers and classmates, a lack of awareness of grammar, a limited vocabulary, and the fact that English differs from Indonesian all contribute to their difficulty speaking the language. Aspects of students' affective lives, such as the frequency with which they practice speaking English and psychological variables, contribute to their challenges in speaking English [17 - 18].

Based on the data collected throughout this community service program, the amount of time it will take for students to reach competency in English is directly related to their current level of language proficiency. The opinions of the training subjects who were categorized as active reveal that Speaking is the skill that poses the most significant challenge. This contrasts with passive students, who claim reading is their strongest suit. It is still legible despite the somewhat less accurate spelling.

CONCLUSIONS

There must be a clear separation between learning English and creating different problems, particularly for students. These challenges are evident in every student's proficiency in a foreign language. The difficulties encountered in a classroom setting by students with varying levels of language proficiency also yield diverse outcomes. Participants in this community service project demonstrated difficulty in four areas of English proficiency: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. The factors that complicate learning English depend on the student's current language skill level [21]. Most female students need help with both oral and written communication. Having difficulty communicating is something male students sometimes find challenging to master [22]. Male pupils outperform female students in English. On the other hand, the data reveal that passive students lack confidence and cannot describe themselves eloquently.

In summary, the students in the English language program at UMTS's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences could use some assistance with speaking correctly, producing essays with good sentence grammar, and creating coherent and well-structured paragraphs. The platform displays the results of the pre- and post-tests administered with Altissia. Considering the challenges and needs of students in English language skills and their challenges in their day-to-day work as educators, this community service concludes with many recommendations for lectors and universities to consider.

To improve classroom instruction, a platform must supplement students' English language acquisition, streamline their training, and provide instructors with fresh ideas for the English language classroom. Second, students need to have a firm grasp of English grammar to demonstrate an in-depth comprehension of the language, and more credit for using online resources for independent English study will facilitate more polished writing. Lastly, communicating in English is seen as a cultural competency. Universities can adopt a policy of giving lecture presentations or openings in English at each final project exam to encourage students to improve their English skills.

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