



Developing a Thematic English Module for Elementary School Students Using the 4D Model

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Abstract

This research aimed to develop a thematic English module as supplementary learning material for sixth-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Palopo. The study was conducted in response to the limited availability of standardized English teaching materials at the elementary level and the need for contextual resources that match young learners' characteristics. This research employed the Research and Development method using the 4D model, consisting of define, design, develop, and disseminate. Data were collected through a teacher interview, students' needs-analysis questionnaire, expert validation sheets, and limited dissemination responses. The participants involved 28 sixth-grade students and one English teacher. The needs analysis was based on Hutchinson and Waters' framework covering necessities, lacks, wants, and learning needs. The findings showed that students needed vocabulary support, sentence examples, speaking practice, and engaging learning activities, while their main difficulties involved sentence construction, vocabulary comprehension, and pronunciation. Based on these needs, the module was designed with three thematic topics and several features, including learning objectives, motivational quotes, magic words, QR-code listening activities, chatter corner, story time, creative writing, a self-reflection journal, and lesson plans. The product was validated by content, language, and design-layout experts and obtained an average score of 87.3%, categorized as good, valid, and applicable with minor revisions. The dissemination with students and the teacher showed positive responses because the module was attractive, easy to use, and relevant to classroom needs. The module is expected to support teachers in delivering English lessons and help elementary students learn English through integrated, interactive, and meaningful activities.

Keywords: *4D Model; English for Young Learners; Research and Development; Supplementary Learning Material; Thematic Module*

Introduction

English plays an important role in communication, education, and access to global information. In Indonesia, English learning at the elementary school level has experienced several policy changes, including its position as an optional subject and the recent movement to strengthen English instruction in schools. These changes create practical challenges for teachers, particularly when schools have to provide learning materials that are appropriate for young learners, relevant to the curriculum, and suitable for students' daily contexts. At SD Muhammadiyah 1 Palopo, English learning also requires materials that can help students learn vocabulary, simple expressions, and integrated language skills in a structured but enjoyable way.

Young learners have distinctive characteristics. They generally show high curiosity, enjoy colorful and concrete media, and learn better when activities are connected to real experiences. Therefore, English teaching materials for elementary students should not only present vocabulary and grammar, but also provide opportunities for listening, speaking, reading, and writing through meaningful activities. Thematic learning is one possible approach because it organizes learning around familiar topics and enables students to connect language with their lives. This approach is also consistent with the principles of English for Young Learners, which emphasize enjoyable, contextual, and multisensory learning experiences (Khoeriyah, 2020; Mujahidah et al., 2022).

Several previous studies have discussed the development of thematic or language learning materials. Wai Leng et al. (2023) designed an integrated thematic preschool STREAM module to support early childhood learning. Syafryadin et al. (2024) developed the TAGANA thematic textbook by integrating Higher Order Thinking Skills and Project-Based Learning to improve students' English proficiency. Puspa Sari et al. (2024) developed a basic English module for secondary-level students using task-based language teaching. Meanwhile, Sari (2021) demonstrated that the 4D model can be applied in developing instructional media through systematic stages of defining needs, designing products, developing validated materials, and disseminating the final product.

Although these studies contribute to the field of material development, they do not specifically address the contextual need for an integrative thematic English module for elementary school students in Palopo. Many available materials focus on certain skills, specific educational levels, or particular teaching approaches, while the needs of young learners require an integrated design that combines language skills, visual support, interactive activities, and teacher guidance. In addition, needs analysis is essential because a module should be designed based on students' necessities, lacks, wants, and learning needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Based on the gap above, this study addresses the following research question: How can a thematic English module for students at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Palopo be developed based on the needs of students and teachers and be considered valid and applicable in English language learning? Therefore, the objective of this study is to develop a contextual thematic English module that integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing while accommodating the needs of students and the English teacher.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of thematic learning, Hutchinson and Waters' needs-analysis framework, and the 4D development model into a student-centered English module that includes QR-code listening activities, bilingual instructions, motivational quotes, self-reflection journals, and contextual themes for elementary school learners.

Method

This study employed a Research and Development design using the 4D model proposed by Thiagarajan et al. (1974). The model consists of four stages: define, design, develop, and disseminate. The define stage was used to identify the needs of students and the English teacher. The design stage was used to prepare the module format, topics, learning activities, and assessment forms. The develop stage focused on producing the module prototype, validating the product with experts, and revising the module based on suggestions. The disseminate stage was conducted through limited product introduction and response collection.

The research was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Palopo. The participants consisted of 28 sixth-grade students and one English teacher. The product was also evaluated by three expert validators representing content, language, and design-layout aspects. The students and teacher provided information about learning needs, while the expert validators assessed the appropriateness and quality of the developed module.

Table 1. Research Participants and Instruments

Data Source	Number	Instrument	Purpose
Sixth-grade students	28 students	Needs-analysis questionnaire	To identify students' necessities, lacks, wants, and learning needs.
English teacher	1 teacher	Semi-structured interview	To identify classroom needs, material availability, and teaching difficulties.
Expert validators	3 experts	Validation sheets	To evaluate content, language, and design layout quality.
Students and teacher	Limited group	Response notes	To collect responses after dissemination of the module.

The data were collected through an interview, questionnaires, validation sheets, and product dissemination responses. The needs-analysis questionnaire was developed based on Hutchinson and Waters' framework, which covers target needs and learning needs. Target needs include necessities, lacks, and wants, while learning needs describe how students expect to learn and what support they need during the learning process.

Qualitative data from the interview and open responses were analyzed descriptively by identifying repeated information related to students' difficulties, preferred activities, and teacher needs. Quantitative data from questionnaires and validation sheets were analyzed using simple percentages and average scores. The expert validation results were converted into product-quality categories to determine whether the module was valid and applicable.

Results

Define Phase

The define phase was conducted to identify the actual condition of English learning and the needs of the students and teacher. The teacher interview indicated that structured supplementary material was needed because the available learning resources were limited and did not fully accommodate students' characteristics. The students' questionnaire revealed that students needed vocabulary lists, sentence examples, simple dialogues, and speaking activities. They also wanted songs, coloring activities, picture-matching exercises, and conversation practice. Their main difficulties were arranging sentences, understanding word meanings, and pronouncing English words.

Before the questionnaire was distributed, the instrument was validated by an expert. The validation covered content, scope of content, and language. The average score was 4.5, which indicated that the instrument was excellent and could be used without major revision.

Table 2. The Result of the Instruments' Validation by the Expert

Aspects	Score
Contents	4
Scope of the Contents	4.5
Language	5
Average Score	4.5

Table 3. Summary of Students' Needs Analysis

Aspect	Finding	Implication for Module Design
Necessities	Students needed sentence examples, nature-related material, vocabulary support, and speaking practice.	The module provides magic words, magic sentences, contextual topics, and chatter-corner activities.

Lacks	Students had difficulty arranging sentences, understanding word meanings, and pronouncing English words.	The module integrates vocabulary lists, guided sentence construction, QR-code listening, and oral practice.
Wants	Students wanted conversation activities, songs, coloring, picture matching, and enjoyable exercises.	The module includes interactive activities, visual tasks, and simple dialogues related to familiar themes.
Learning Needs	Students expected the module to help them understand materials better and preferred learning through videos, games, and teacher support.	The module uses bilingual instructions, QR-code media, reflective journals, and teacher lesson plans.

Design Phase

The design phase focused on preparing the structure and features of the thematic English module. The module was organized into three main topics: My Life at Home, My Body in Action, and My School Days. These topics were selected because they are close to students' daily experiences and can support vocabulary development, simple communication, and integrated skill practice.

Each chapter was designed with repeated learning elements to make the module easy to use. The elements included learning objectives, motivational quotes, magic words, listen and discover, chatter corner, story time, creative writing, my learning journal, and lesson plan. These elements were developed to integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a student-centered learning sequence.

Table 4. Blueprint of the Thematic English Module

No.	Topic	Main Elements	Learning Focus
1	My Life at Home	Learning objectives, motivational quote, magic words, listening, speaking, reading, writing, journal, lesson plan.	Vocabulary and simple expressions related to family and home activities.
2	My Body in Action	Learning objectives, motivational quote, magic words, listening, speaking, reading, writing, journal, lesson plan.	Body parts, hobbies, outdoor activities, and healthy habits.
3	My School Days	Learning objectives, motivational quote, magic words, listening, speaking, reading, writing, journal, lesson plan.	School routines, classroom objects, and daily communication at school

Develop Phase

In the develop phase, the prototype of the thematic English module was produced using the Canva application. The prototype was prepared based on the needs analysis and the module blueprint. The visual design used colorful layouts, pictures, and bilingual instructions to help students understand the activities. The module also included QR-code listening activities to support pronunciation and listening practice.

After the prototype was completed, the product was validated by three experts. The content expert evaluated the relevance of materials to learning objectives and elementary students' level. The language expert evaluated grammar, clarity of instruction, and suitability of language for young learners. The design-layout expert evaluated attractiveness, consistency, readability, and visual organization. The validators suggested several revisions, including improving wording, adjusting margins, organizing layout elements, and strengthening the representation of quoted content. After revision, the module was considered valid and applicable.

Table 5. Product Validation Results

Validator	Score	Percentage	Category
Content expert	3.60	90.0%	Good/valid
Language expert	3.66	91.5%	Good/valid
Design-layout expert	3.22	80.5%	Good/valid
Average	-	87.3%	Good, valid, and applicable with minor revisions



Figure 1. Thematic English Module

Disseminate Phase

The dissemination phase was conducted on March 13, 2026 at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Palopo. The activity involved ten sixth-grade students and one English teacher. During this phase, the researcher introduced the module, explained its features, and demonstrated how to use the activities in the learning process.

The students gave positive responses to the module. They stated that the module was interesting, colorful, and easy to understand. They also liked the interactive activities and familiar themes. The teacher also responded positively because the module provided structured materials and practical guidance for teaching English at the elementary level. Therefore, the module can be regarded as an applicable supplementary learning resource for English instruction.

Discussion

The Importance of a Thematic English Module for Young Learners

The results show that elementary school students need learning materials that are attractive, contextual, and activity-based. The thematic module developed in this research responds to those needs by connecting English learning to familiar topics such as home, body activities, and school days. This finding supports the idea that thematic learning helps students understand concepts more meaningfully because learning materials are organized around real-life contexts (Khoeriyah, 2020).

The module also reflects the principles of English for Young Learners. Students at the elementary level usually enjoy learning through visual media, games, songs, stories, and practical activities. Therefore, the inclusion of magic words, QR-code listening, story time, chatter corner, creative writing, and self-reflection journals can help create a more engaging learning experience. This is in line with Mujahidah et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of thematic units in supporting English learning for young learners.

Needs-Based Development and Integrated Skills

The development of the module was based on students' necessities, lacks, wants, and learning needs. This needs-based process is important because teaching materials should be relevant to the learners' actual condition. The students' difficulties in vocabulary comprehension, sentence construction, and pronunciation became the basis for designing vocabulary lists, guided sentences, listening activities, and speaking practice. Thus, the module does not only present content but also responds directly to students' learning problems.

The module integrates four language skills in each chapter. Listening is supported through QR-code audio activities, speaking through chatter corner and conversation practice, reading through story time, and writing through creative writing tasks. This integration allows students to practice English comprehensively rather than learning each skill separately. It also helps teachers organize classroom activities in a clear sequence from input to output.

Expert Validation and Product Quality

The expert validation results indicate that the module is valid and applicable. The content score shows that the materials are relevant to the learning objectives and suitable for sixth-grade students. The language score indicates that the instructions and texts are understandable for young learners. The design-layout score shows that the visual presentation is attractive and supports student engagement. The average percentage of 87.3% demonstrates that the product meets the criteria of a good supplementary learning material.

The revisions suggested by the validators improved the quality of the final product. Improvements in wording, visual consistency, margins, and layout organization made the module clearer and easier to use. This confirms that expert validation is an important stage in Research and Development because it ensures that the product is not only creative but also pedagogically appropriate.

Conclusion

This research successfully developed a thematic English module as supplementary learning material for sixth-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Palopo using the 4D model. The module was developed through define, design, develop, and disseminate stages. The needs analysis showed that students needed vocabulary support, sentence examples, speaking practice, and enjoyable activities, while their main difficulties were related to vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction. Based on those findings, the module was designed to integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing through contextual and interactive learning activities.

The validation results from content, language, and design-layout experts showed that the module was valid and applicable with minor revisions. The average validation score was 87.3%, which indicates that the product was categorized as good. The limited dissemination also showed positive responses from students and the teacher because the module was attractive, easy to understand, and useful for English learning activities. Therefore, the developed thematic English module can be considered an appropriate supplementary learning resource for elementary school English instruction.

This study has several limitations. First, it focused on developing and validating the module without conducting a large-scale implementation to measure its effectiveness in improving students' English achievement. Second, the participants were limited to sixth-grade students and one English teacher at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Palopo, so the findings may not be generalized to all elementary school contexts. Third, the dissemination stage was limited to product introduction and response collection rather than long-term classroom use.

Future researchers are recommended to conduct experimental studies to measure the effectiveness of the module on students' English proficiency and learning outcomes. Similar modules can also be developed for different grade levels

or educational contexts by integrating more digital and interactive learning technologies. Teachers are encouraged to use thematic and student-centered materials to create more meaningful and engaging English learning experiences for young learners.

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