

STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL LITERACY IN THAILAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN FOREIGN CURRENCIES

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ABSTRACT Financial literacy is a crucial life skill that remains underrepresented in many educational curricula, especially at the elementary level. This study presents a community service initiative designed to enhance financial literacy among school students by introducing Southeast Asian foreign currencies. The program was implemented in Lukmanuhakim Yala, Thailand, where 120 students participated. The methodology included lecture sessions, interactive workshops, and hands-on practice to facilitate currency recognition, understanding of exchange rates, and awareness of financial security measures. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in students' ability to identify different currencies, comprehend exchange rate dynamics, and detect counterfeit money. The findings suggest that early exposure to financial education positively influences young learners' financial decision-making skills. It is recommended that financial literacy education be integrated into school curricula and expanded to include digital financial management topics.

Keywords: *Financial Literacy, Foreign Currency Education, Southeast Asia, Currency Exchange, Financial Security, Elementary Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Financial literacy is an essential life skill, yet it remains underemphasized in many educational curricula, particularly at the elementary school level. Young students often lack exposure to financial concepts, leaving them unprepared for future economic responsibilities. According to Lusardi and Mitchell (2014), early financial education plays a crucial role in shaping long-term financial behavior, reducing the risk of debt mismanagement, and enhancing overall economic decision-making. With increasing globalization and economic interdependence, understanding different currencies and exchange rates has become more relevant. Many students will eventually engage in international transactions, whether through travel, online shopping, or future professional endeavors. However, without foundational financial knowledge, they may struggle to navigate these situations effectively. This community service initiative was designed to bridge the knowledge gap among school students regarding foreign currencies, focusing specifically on those of Southeast Asia. By familiarizing students with different currency values, exchange rate

fluctuations, and security features, this program aimed to equip them with essential financial skills at an early age.

Introducing foreign currencies to young students has multiple benefits, including enhancing financial awareness, preventing fraud, and preparing them for future international interactions. Early exposure to financial concepts fosters responsible money management habits, which are crucial for personal financial security. In an era where online transactions and digital payments are increasingly common, financial literacy is not just about handling physical money but also about understanding digital finance. Moreover, students who possess knowledge of currency security features are less likely to fall victim to fraud or counterfeit money scams. According to Atkinson and Messy (2012), financial literacy education at a young age significantly reduces vulnerability to financial fraud. The program aimed to familiarize students with currency denominations, security features, and exchange rate dynamics through engaging and interactive methods that ensure long-term retention.

The primary objectives of this initiative were to educate students on the different currencies used in Southeast Asia, their historical context, and economic significance; to enhance students' understanding of currency exchange rates, their fluctuations, and real-world applications in international trade and travel; and to develop awareness of financial security and fraud prevention related to foreign currencies. Through this program, students were empowered to recognize counterfeit money and make informed financial decisions. By achieving these objectives, the program sought to contribute to the development of financially literate individuals who are well-prepared to participate in the increasingly interconnected global economy.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were elementary school students from Lukmanuhakim Yala, Thailand. The target group consisted of students aged 10 to 16 years, with a total of 80 participants. These students were selected based on their interest in financial literacy and participation in extracurricular economic education programs. The diversity in age and educational background allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the program's impact across different cognitive development levels.

2.2 Implementation and Procedure

The implementation of this financial literacy program was carried out in three key phases:

Phase	Description
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Lecture Sessions	Students were introduced to the concept of money, its history, and the significance of various Southeast Asian currencies. Experts in financial education delivered engaging lectures emphasizing the economic role of currency and exchange rate fluctuations.
Interactive Workshops	Hands-on activities allowed students to identify different currency denominations, understand security features, and calculate exchange rates. Role-playing exercises were also conducted to simulate real-world financial transactions.
Hands-on Practice	Practical application sessions provided students with the opportunity to engage in mock currency exchanges, reinforcing their understanding of international financial interactions. Simulated market transactions were utilized to help students grasp the dynamics of fluctuating exchange rates.

The program was designed to be interactive, ensuring that students remained engaged throughout the learning process. Evaluation surveys and feedback sessions were conducted at the end of the program to measure the effectiveness of the activities and identify areas for improvement.



Figure 1. Participants at the workshop

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Improved Currency Recognition

Students exhibited increased familiarity with different currencies, particularly the Thai Baht (THB), Malaysian Ringgit (MYR), Indonesian Rupiah (IDR), Philippine Peso (PHP), and Vietnamese Dong (VND). By the end of the program, over 85% of participants were able to

correctly identify and differentiate the currencies based on their denominations and security features. This improvement aligns with previous findings by Lusardi and Tufano (2015), who emphasized the importance of hands-on financial education in enhancing currency recognition and financial competency among young learners.

3.2 Enhanced Understanding of Exchange Rates

Through simulation exercises, students grasped the concept of fluctuating exchange rates and their implications for trade and travel. Many participants demonstrated an ability to calculate currency conversions with improved accuracy, showcasing their understanding of how exchange rates impact international transactions. Research by Xu and Zia (2012) also highlights that students who are exposed to exchange rate exercises at an early age develop stronger analytical skills in economic decision-making, supporting the positive outcomes observed in this study.

3.3 Increased Financial Awareness

Post-program surveys indicated a heightened awareness of financial security, with students demonstrating improved ability to differentiate between genuine and counterfeit banknotes. This is a crucial aspect of financial literacy, as noted by Huston (2010), who argues that recognizing security features in banknotes significantly reduces the likelihood of financial fraud. Additionally, students expressed greater confidence in handling foreign currency transactions and reported an increased interest in financial literacy topics. A similar study by Fernandes, Lynch, and Netemeyer (2014) found that increased financial literacy training at an early age has long-term effects on financial decision-making and fraud prevention.

The overall findings suggest that early exposure to financial concepts significantly benefits young students by equipping them with essential skills for navigating global financial systems. Future programs may explore integrating digital financial literacy to further enhance student competency in modern economic environments. Furthermore, collaborations with financial institutions and educational technology platforms could amplify the program's effectiveness by providing students with more real-world financial interactions and digital banking simulations.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the importance of financial literacy education at an early age. The program successfully improved students' understanding of foreign currencies, exchange rates, and financial security measures. By integrating hands-on activities, students developed practical skills that will benefit them in real-world financial situations. To further enhance the effectiveness of financial literacy programs, it is recommended that schools incorporate financial education into their curricula. Collaboration with financial institutions and technology-based

learning platforms can provide students with more immersive and practical experiences. Additionally, expanding the program to include topics such as digital currency and online financial transactions would be beneficial in preparing students for the evolving financial landscape. Future research should explore the long-term impact of financial literacy education on students' financial behaviors and decision-making processes.

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