

**ENHANCING BASIC ENGLISH SKILLS THROUGH CONTEXTUAL  
AND PARTICIPATORY LEARNING FOR FEMALE ORPHANS AT  
TUNAS HARAPAN ORPHANAGE, SITUBONDO**

E-ISSN : 3089-4980  
P-ISSN : 3089-2228  
Submitted : February 12, 2025  
Accepted : April 21, 2025  
Published : July 01, 2025  
Page : 1-8  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.31294/jabdimas.v7i1.6576>  
Citation (in APA) : Kamalia, Z. P., & Hadi, A. H. (2025). Enhancing Basic English Skills through Contextual and Participatory Learning for Female Orphans at Tunas Harapan Orphanage, Situbondo. *International Journal of Community Service in Language, Literature, Culture, and Their Teaching*, 2(1), 1–8.

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**Abstract**

This community service project aimed to improve the basic English skills of female students at Tunas Harapan Orphanage in Situbondo, Indonesia. The program responded to limited access to English education due to insufficient learning support and resources. A contextual and participatory approach was implemented over four weeks, involving 20 participants across various education levels. The methods included language games, songs, role-playing, visual aids, and interactive dialogue. Materials focused on basic vocabulary, pronunciation, and simple sentence construction. A needs assessment informed the lesson design, while formative evaluation tracked learner progress. The results showed increased confidence, vocabulary acquisition, and speaking fluency. A final product, the English Wall Magazine, was created collaboratively to support ongoing learning. This initiative supports previous research on the value of interactive, learner-centered methods in non-formal settings. It also demonstrates that impactful language learning can occur even with limited infrastructure when tailored to the learners' context and needs.

**Keywords:** english learning, participatory approach, tunas harapan orphanage

**INTRODUCTION**

English, as the global lingua franca, plays a crucial role in various aspects of modern life, including education, technology, economics, and international communication (Abimanto et al., 2023). English proficiency is not only essential for academic success but also serves as an important indicator of an individual's readiness to face increasingly competitive globalization (Graddol, 2006). Therefore, mastering the English language is an urgent competency that every individual should possess, including children who live in underprivileged social environments. Unfortunately, the gap in access to quality education, particularly in English learning, remains a significant issue in many regions (Berliana et al., 2024).

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Children in orphanages, for example, often do not have the opportunity to receive additional lessons outside school hours due to a lack of teaching resources and adequate learning facilities (Recard et al., 2024)

Tunas Harapan Orphanage, located in Panarukan Subdistrict, Situbondo Regency, is a social institution that houses female children from various educational levels with economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Based on preliminary observations and interviews with the orphanage administrators, it was revealed that the girls show enthusiasm for learning English, yet they have not received systematic and intensive instruction. Limited learning support and a lack of variety in learning media are the main obstacles. This condition has led to inadequate mastery of basic English skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure, and has also decreased motivation to learn due to the perception that English is a difficult subject. This is supported by Simorangkir et al., (2022), whose research showed that the lack of learning facilities and monotonous teaching methods make orphanage children feel unfamiliar and struggle to understand English lessons at school.

Recognizing this issue, this initiative aims to improve the basic English skills of the orphanage girls through contextual and engaging teaching methods. This activity is a form of implementation of the third pillar of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, namely community service. The training is designed using communicative and participatory approaches and is tailored to the participants' proficiency levels. It is hoped that this program will not only enhance the English skills of the girls but also make a tangible contribution to the effort to equalize access to education in underserved areas.

Previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of various English learning models in orphanage environments. For example, a study by Hastuti et al., (2022), emphasized the challenges of online learning for orphanage children due to limited electronic devices and caregiver capacity. Through group teaching methods combined with educational games, discussions, and direct Q&A sessions, this mentoring program successfully increased participants' enthusiasm and confidence in using English actively. Another study by Rismadewi et al., (2024), offered a solution to the low English proficiency among children by integrating interactive web-based learning media, which significantly improved their understanding of basic English material and academic performance. In addition, the game-based learning approach implemented by Hidayat et al., (2024), also demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, the ability to construct simple sentences, and the courage to speak in public. Findings from these three studies strengthen the notion that communicative, enjoyable, and technology-supported learning approaches can be effective solutions for improving English language skills among children in socially disadvantaged environments.

## **PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

Based on field observations and direct interaction with the female students at Tunas Harapan Orphanage, several key issues were identified that hinder the English learning process. First, limited access to supplementary learning outside formal schooling is a fundamental obstacle. The students only receive English lessons at school with a limited duration, usually once or twice a week. This limited exposure is insufficient to develop comprehensive English proficiency, especially in speaking and writing skills.

Second, the students' low self-confidence in using English also poses a significant challenge. In learning practices, many participants feel shy about speaking or expressing themselves in English. This issue is worsened by their limited vocabulary and pronunciation errors, which cause the students to become passive and reluctant to actively participate in the learning process. Third, the lack of engaging learning media and appealing pedagogical approaches has led some students to perceive English as a difficult and boring subject. This mindset negatively affects their motivation to learn.

As an effort to address these issues, a solution was designed in the form of an English training program using a communicative and contextual approach. This approach prioritizes active interaction between facilitators and learners, and integrates various enjoyable methods such as language games, singing, simple dialogues, and watching short English films. In addition, the learning materials are tailored to the participants' age and proficiency level, starting from basic concepts such as vocabulary introduction, pronunciation, and simple sentences used in daily conversations.

The implementation of this program is also supported by the creation of alternative learning media in the form of an educational wall magazine (English Wall Magazine), containing learning materials, vocabulary, and the students' work during the program. This medium is expected to serve as a sustainable self-learning tool, even after the training program has ended. With a more humanistic and participatory approach, this activity is expected to gradually and sustainably improve the students' interest, self-confidence, and basic English skills.

## **METHOD**

This community service activity adopts a descriptive-qualitative approach to explore in depth the implementation of participatory-based English language learning at the Tunas Harapan Orphanage. The research subjects were female students from various educational levels (elementary, junior high, and senior high school), with approximately 20 participants who demonstrated varying levels of English proficiency. The intervention was carried out over a period of four weeks, from May to June 2023, with sessions held twice a week.

The implementation of the program was designed through a series of systematic and integrated stages. The initial phase involved a comprehensive needs assessment, which included in-depth interviews to understand the participants' motivation and learning experiences, informal diagnostic assessments to map their initial abilities, discussions with orphanage staff regarding the learning context, and direct observation of English language interactions within the orphanage environment. This approach aligns with the perspective of Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007), who emphasize the importance of initial assessment in educational program design to ensure that learning materials and strategies are tailored to the learners' needs. Based on the assessment results, the next stage involved developing contextual learning materials relevant to the students' daily lives, with a focus on mastering basic vocabulary, communicative expressions, sentence formation, and speaking practice through dialogues.

The materials were presented through the integration of various engaging and interactive learning media. The learning implementation process emphasized a participatory approach using cooperative learning methods to encourage collaboration, role-playing to practice language use in context, the use of visual media as learning stimuli, and the incorporation of enjoyable activities such as singing, educational quizzes, and the screening of short English-language videos. This strategy is consistent with the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasizes interaction-based learning and language use in real-life situations, as stated by Richards & Rodgers (2014). Active interaction was facilitated through Q&A sessions and constructive feedback.

Finally, formative evaluation was carried out continuously through observations of language skill development, assessments of active participation levels in each session, analysis of responses to assigned tasks, and collection of participant feedback as a basis for implementation adjustments.

As an additional output of the teaching and learning activities, the service team produced an educational product in the form of a thematic wall magazine titled **"English Wall Magazine."** This product functions as a sustainable learning medium that summarizes essential materials, lists key vocabulary, and showcases the students' work produced during the learning process. This initiative aims to provide a learning resource that can be independently accessed by the participants and orphanage staff after the program concludes. The wall magazine was collaboratively developed by university students and the orphanage girls, a process that not only enriched the magazine content but also empowered the participants and fostered a sense of ownership over the learning materials.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The English training program conducted at the Tunas Harapan Orphanage showed positive outcomes despite several challenges. Based on observations

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throughout the activity, there was a noticeable improvement in the basic English skills of the female students, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and the confidence to speak English. At the beginning of the program, most participants tended to be passive, felt shy about speaking, and experienced difficulty understanding the material—especially in pronunciation and basic sentence structure.



Figure 1. Learning media using videos.

However, the communicative, interactive, and context-based learning approach succeeded in creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere and encouraged active participation. The use of various learning media—such as songs, educational games, and English-language videos—proved effective in increasing the students' enthusiasm and motivation. Several participants began to take the initiative to speak in English, such as greeting with “Good morning,” “How are you?” or “See you tomorrow” outside of formal learning sessions. This indicated a shift in their attitude toward English, from something perceived as difficult to something enjoyable and engaging.



Figure 2. Practice speaking.



In addition, the simple written works and oral exercises collected during the program showed improvements in writing skills, particularly in the use of basic vocabulary and simple sentence structures. Although there were still spelling and grammar errors, the participants began to understand basic concepts such as the use of base verbs (verb 1), articles (a, an, the), and pronouns. This progress was supported by strategies such as repetition, group practice, and immediate correction during the learning process.

Overall, the results of this activity align with several previous studies. For example, a study by Hastuti et al., (2022), showed that group learning approaches combined with games and discussions could enhance the confidence of orphaned children in using English. Similar outcomes were observed in this program, where language games and role-playing methods successfully built the girls' courage to speak in public.

Meanwhile, the research by Rismadewi et al., (2024), demonstrated the effectiveness of web-based interactive learning media in improving understanding of basic English materials. Although this activity did not rely heavily on digital technology, the use of visual approaches through the *English Wall Magazine* served as an alternative learning medium that positively impacted the participants' retention of materials.

Furthermore, the study by Hidayat et al., (2024), which adopted a game-based learning method, proved that fun learning strategies can enhance vocabulary acquisition and speaking confidence. This was also evident in the current activity, where the integration of enjoyable methods led to significant improvements in vocabulary mastery and active engagement from participants.

Despite the alignment with previous studies, there are important contextual differences worth noting. While Rismadewi et al., (2024), research primarily focused on technological integration, this program emphasized interpersonal approaches and local wisdom using limited resources. Similarly, unlike previous studies mostly conducted by institutions with large-scale program support, this activity was carried out by a group of university students with limited resources yet managed to produce tangible impact. Therefore, this initiative reinforces the idea that enhancing English language competence does not always require advanced technology but can be achieved through participatory approaches tailored to the learners' characteristics and learning environment.

The challenges encountered during implementation included time discipline issues, easily distracted classroom environments, and fluctuating learning motivation among participants. However, through persuasive approaches, method adaptation, and consistent facilitator presence, these obstacles were gradually minimized. This highlights the importance of strategic flexibility in non-formal education activities involving target groups from complex social backgrounds.

## CONCLUSIONS

The English training program conducted at the Tunas Harapan Orphanage has demonstrated that a communicative, participatory, and contextual learning approach can serve as an effective strategy for improving basic English skills in non-formal settings. The results of the program showed noticeable improvement in the students' vocabulary, pronunciation, construction of simple sentences, and confidence in speaking publicly. The use of enjoyable methods and visual learning media such as the *English Wall Magazine* also had a positive impact on participants' enthusiasm and absorption of the material.

These achievements align with findings from previous studies that emphasize the importance of activity-based learning in enhancing English language acquisition among orphaned children. However, this program presents a unique aspect in that it was implemented with limited resources, without reliance on advanced technology, and focused more on interpersonal interaction and the effective use of simple media. This indicates that limited facilities do not pose a major barrier as long as learning strategies are tailored to participants' needs and carried out consistently.

Based on the program outcomes and field evaluations, it is recommended that similar programs be implemented on a continuous basis and incorporated into regular development activities within the orphanage. Collaboration with educational institutions, volunteer communities, and universities can strengthen the program's sustainability and broaden its impact. Additionally, further training for orphanage staff is needed so they can independently carry out English learning programs after the intervention. Future research using a quantitative approach and experimental design is also recommended to measure the program's effectiveness more systematically.

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