OPTIMIZING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH INNOVATIVE METHODS AND SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES AT MA NURUL HIKAM

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Abstract
This community service program was carried out at MA Nurul Hikam Situbondo with the aim of enhancing the quality of English language learning through the application of innovative, interactive methods and supporting non-formal activities. The initiative addressed key challenges such as monotonous teaching methods, lack of visual learning media, and the absence of extracurricular platforms for language practice. The strategies implemented included the use of communicative and participatory classroom techniques, the development of educational posters as visual aids, and the revitalization of an English Club to support students' speaking confidence. Based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) and descriptive qualitative methods, the program showed positive outcomes, including increased student engagement, creativity, and confidence in using English both in and outside the classroom. The results highlight the importance of integrating formal instruction with creative and non-formal learning activities to foster holistic language development, especially in rural madrasah settings with limited resources.

Keywords: **english language learning, english club, visual media**

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the subjects that plays a vital role in shaping 21st-century competencies among students, particularly in the areas of global communication, critical thinking, and the use of information technology. Proficiency in English offers significant competitive advantages in various fields, including business, communication, and industry, as the language is widely used around the world. Furthermore, English language learning allows students to enhance their critical thinking skills through the four core competencies: writing, listening, speaking, and reading (Rima et al., 2024). Amid the growing global demands for English proficiency, challenges persist in the teaching and learning process at the madrasah

level, particularly in semi-urban or rural areas. These challenges include limited learning media, lack of variety in teaching methods, and low student motivation toward the subject. Research shows that in rural schools, English language instruction faces numerous obstacles, such as low student interest, insufficient support from the surrounding environment, and generally poor English teacher quality (Harlina & Yusuf, 2020).

Based on initial observations and discussions with the English teacher at MA Nurul Hikam, the prevailing teaching practices were identified as heavily textbook-oriented and dominated by lecture methods and exercise drills. This approach, as pointed out by Arsyad et al., (2024), is often seen as unappealing to students in today's digital era and can lead to decreased motivation and active participation in learning. Similar findings are emphasized by Shaila & Trudell (2010), who note that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students often struggle with language limitations that hinder their ability to understand teacher explanations, process textbook content, participate in class discussions, and produce satisfactory written assignments. This situation is suspected to be a result of prior learning experiences that were passive and teacher-centered. Consequently, students have limited opportunities to develop productive language skills, such as speaking and writing. Furthermore, Seemanath & Watanapokakul (2024), highlight that lecture-based, teacher-centered methods tend to cause boredom and reduced student focus due to the lack of activities that connect learning materials to real-world contexts. In fact, interactive, contextual, and student-responsive teaching approaches are believed to be crucial for overcoming disengagement and improving the effectiveness of English language learning.

As a contribution to improving the quality of education, especially in English teaching, we conducted a community service activity at MA Nurul Hikam. This activity was not driven by academic obligations such as fieldwork practice but stemmed from our awareness and concern for the education sector. The goal of this program was to optimize the English learning process through the application of innovative and interactive methods, as well as to provide supporting activities such as an English Club that facilitates students in using English more actively and contextually.

By applying strategies such as media-based learning using visual aids (posters), ice-breaking activities, and involving students in open discussions, we hoped that students would better understand the material, feel more motivated to learn, and gain a more enjoyable learning experience. Moreover, this program also served as a hands-on learning opportunity for us to understand classroom dynamics, apply theoretical knowledge gained from university, and enhance our pedagogical and social competencies.

Aligned with the focus of this community service program, previous research has highlighted the urgency of strengthening English language education in

madrasah settings, especially through the implementation of contextual and interactive approaches. For instance, a community engagement project by Suryadi et al., (2024) demonstrated that English for Specific Purposes (ESP)-based interventions significantly contributed to improving students' English skills, particularly in preparation for the workforce. By using role-playing methods and contextual learning, students were able to understand the practical application of English in specific situations more meaningfully and relevantly.

Similar results were reported by Mandasari et al., (2022) in an English assistance program for high school/vocational school students in Purworejo Village, Central Lampung. This program focused on strengthening applicable basic English skills, including self-introductions, daily activities, and simple conversation exercises. The results showed increased student confidence in speaking English and a greater interest in non-formal learning sessions.

Furthermore, the implementation of content-based English learning using interactive media at a Madrasah Tsanawiyah, as studied by Aprianto et al., (2022), was also found to be effective in creating a more engaging and participatory learning environment. By integrating visual and audio media with hands-on practice, students showed improved focus and interest in understanding the material, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and comprehension of simple texts. This approach further reinforces the assumption that utilizing innovative media plays a crucial role in achieving learning objectives, especially in madrasah settings, which often face limitations in technology use and interactive teaching methods.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Based on field observations and intensive interactions with teachers and students at MA Nurul Hikam, several fundamental issues were identified as obstacles in the English learning process. These problems are related not only to teaching methodology but also to the lack of learning resources and the absence of platforms for the functional development of language skills.

1. **Limited Variety in Teaching Methods**
   English learning in the classroom is still dominated by conventional approaches such as lectures and textbook-based exercises. This method is primarily focused on cognitive mastery and has yet to optimally encourage the development of students' communicative skills (speaking and writing). As a result, students tend to be passive, less motivated, and often rely on rote memorization without understanding the contextual use of the language.

2. **Lack of Contextual Visual Learning Media**
   The learning materials used are mostly limited to textbooks and whiteboards, without incorporating visual aids such as posters, pictures, or vocabulary cards. In fact, visual media have been proven to enhance memory retention, learning interest, and student understanding, particularly in vocabulary and grammar

acquisition. The lack of visual media also limits the variety of learning stimuli that can cater to students' diverse learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).

3. **Absence of Non-Formal English Practice Opportunities**

   There is no existing forum that supports students in practicing English outside the formal classroom context. The English Club, which is supposed to serve as a communicative and enjoyable supplementary learning space, has not yet been actively and systematically implemented. This results in limited opportunities for students to develop functional language skills and build confidence in using English in everyday life.

   To address these challenges, we designed and implemented several strategic solutions that are practical, contextual, and based on active student participation:

- **Textbook-Based Teaching Enhanced with a Communicative Approach**

  While the textbook remains the primary reference in accordance with the curriculum, the teaching approach was modified using participatory techniques such as group discussions, educational games (language games), role-playing, and mini-presentations. The aim is to create a collaborative and enjoyable classroom atmosphere that facilitates meaningful learning for students.

- **Development of Visual Media in the Form of Educational Poster**

  We designed posters containing grammar points, vocabulary, idioms, and inspirational quotes in English, which were displayed on school bulletin boards. These media serve not only as visual aids but are also used as part of ice-breaking strategies at the beginning of lessons. Students are encouraged to read and discuss the poster content, making the learning process more interactive and less monotonous.

- **Revitalizing the English Club as a Non-Formal Practice Platform**

  We reinitiated the English Club with an informal approach focused on practical language use. In these sessions, students engage in light discussions, storytelling, role-plays, and sharing experiences in English. These activities aim to build students' confidence, fluency, and sense of ownership over their language learning journey.

  By integrating formal instruction, visual aids, and non-formal activities, we hope to create a holistic learning environment that is responsive to students' needs. The implemented solutions are also expected to serve as a simple, replicable model for teachers to apply in their everyday classroom teaching.

METHOD

This community service program was carried out over the course of one full month, from mid-February to mid-March 2025, at MA Nurul Hikam Situbondo. The program adopted a participatory and educational approach, emphasizing synergistic collaboration between the student implementers, English subject teachers, and the madrasah students. Methodologically, the program integrated the

principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Kemmis et al., 2016), where students, teachers, and learners were actively involved in a cycle of observation, planning, action, and reflection. In addition, a descriptive qualitative method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was used to describe and understand the natural learning process through classroom observation, documentation, and informal discussions with school stakeholders. The implementation of this program was carried out through the following stages:

1. Initial Observation and Problem Identification Stage

   Before the program implementation, the student team conducted informal observations of English language teaching and learning dynamics in the classroom. This stage aimed to comprehensively identify the students' learning needs, the challenges they faced in the learning process, and the common teaching approaches applied by the teachers. Data collection was carried out through direct participation in classroom activities, brief interviews with English subject teachers, and initial constructive discussions with students.

2. Program Planning Stage

   Based on the needs assessment results, the student team developed a structured and targeted activity plan. This plan included several main components:

   - Implementation of English language teaching based on relevant textbooks, prioritizing communicative and interactive approaches to enhance student participation.
   - Development of attractive and effective visual learning media in the form of posters containing essential grammar and vocabulary materials.
   - Initiation and management of extracurricular activities through the English Club as a platform for students to practice their English skills informally and enjoyably.

   The planning stage also included the preparation of a systematic activity schedule, the establishment of a clear program implementation flow, effective role and responsibility distribution among student team members, and the provision of necessary teaching tools and materials.

3. Program Implementation Stage

   The program was implemented through several core activities:

   a. Classroom Teaching Activities: teaching sessions were conducted in grades X, XI, and XII based on the applicable curricula: the Merdeka Curriculum for grades X and XI, and the 2013 Curriculum for grade XII. Learning materials were delivered using the designated textbooks but combined with various interactive activities designed to enhance student engagement. These included structured group discussions, educational vocabulary games, contextual conversation practice, and creative assignments that encouraged self-expression.

b. Creation and Use of Learning Posters: visual posters containing summaries of grammar material and essential vocabulary were designed to be attractive and decorated with relevant visuals. They were strategically displayed on the school bulletin boards. These posters were incorporated into ice-breaking strategies, where students were directed to read and understand the content before the lesson began. The goal was to improve student focus and provide an initial understanding of the material to be studied.

c. *English Club*: The English Club was held once a week after formal class hours. Students acted as facilitators in this activity, leading light discussions on topics of interest to the students and training their conversation skills in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. The choice of topics and methods was tailored to the students' interests and preferences to create a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment.

4. Evaluation and Reflection Stage

Evaluation was carried out continuously and informally through various mechanisms. Daily discussions among the student team members were conducted to share experiences and identify areas for improvement. Constructive feedback was also gathered from the English subject teachers to gain a more comprehensive perspective. Moreover, observations of student enthusiasm and participation in each activity served as key indicators of the program's success. This formative evaluation approach meant that the evaluation results were directly used to refine the ongoing implementation. Complete documentation of the process and outcomes was also collected to support the preparation of the final report and serve as reflective learning material for the participating students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service activities conducted at MA Nurul Hikam yielded significant outcomes in enhancing the quality of English language learning, which included innovations in teaching methods, the use of effective learning media, the development of students' creative products, and active involvement in various school activities.

In classroom teaching for grades X, XI, and XII, university students implemented communicative and participatory approaches aligned with the applicable curriculum. The application of group discussions, simple dialogues, language games, and ice-breaking activities proved effective in creating a dynamic learning environment and encouraging active student participation. The students' positive responses, shown through enthusiasm, willingness to express opinions, and active involvement in each learning session, indicated a significant improvement in their interest and self-confidence in using English. These findings align with Suryadi et al., (2024), who adopted an English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

approach through role-playing to train the use of English in professional contexts. Although the two programs had different focuses, ESP being more profession-oriented, while the MA Nurul Hikam program emphasized student participation and comfort in general communication both share a common goal of promoting contextual and practical English usage.

Furthermore, in terms of learning media, the student team demonstrated creativity by designing and displaying educational posters on the school bulletin board. These posters contained grammar material, vocabulary, and motivational quotes in English and were integrated into a "poster ice-breaking" strategy. The habit of reading these posters before the lesson began proved effective in capturing students' attention and sparking curiosity, often leading to light discussions before entering the core material. The effectiveness of this visual-based learning approach in increasing student interest and reinforcing understanding aligns with the study by Aprianto et al., (2022) which explored the application of interactive content-based learning using visual and audio media. Although MA Nurul Hikam faced technological limitations and relied on printed posters, the results showed comparable effectiveness given the available resources.

In addition to the posters, this program also resulted in a unique and engaging learning product: English-language graffiti. This activity was implemented during the teaching of descriptive text and visual expression in grade X. Students were encouraged to express their understanding of vocabulary and simple sentences through graphic art using drawing paper. This activity not only fostered learning interest but also significantly trained students' creativity and confidence in using English visually. The displayed works demonstrated the students' ability to combine linguistic understanding with artistic expression, indicating that integrating visual arts into foreign language learning can be an effective means to deepen content comprehension while building emotional connection with the subject matter. This product-based learning model, which is still underrepresented in previous studies, became one of the unique strengths of the community service project and aligns with the principles of multiple intelligences, which emphasize the importance of accommodating various learning styles, including visual and kinesthetic.

The development of the English Club also contributed significantly by creating a non-formal learning space where students could practice speaking and discussion in a relaxed setting outside formal class hours. Although it could only be conducted twice due to the school's tight schedule and the beginning of Ramadan, student enthusiasm, particularly from grades X and XI, was notably high. Their eagerness to ask questions, express opinions, and explore English usage in open discussions revealed the great potential of informal activities like the English Club in building student confidence. These results are consistent with the findings Mandasari et al., (2022), who also emphasized that light, practical, and communicative learning sessions effectively increase students' willingness to speak

English, especially in speaking practice. Both initiatives reinforce the importance of strengthening foreign language learning through non-formal pathways, particularly in school environments lacking a bilingual atmosphere.

Finally, the active involvement of university students in various school activities, such as serving as judges in speech contests, assisting students during health check-ups, and participating in social and environmental programs, extended the positive impact of the service program beyond the classroom. This involvement reflected a deep understanding of the school's social dynamics, fostered strong relationships with all school members, and enhanced the students' social empathy. These activities offered transformative experiences for the university students as future educators while providing significant positive contributions to the partner school.

Thus, the outcomes of this community service program not only demonstrate the successful implementation of the planned activities but also reinforce the relevance of education-based community service as a tangible contribution from university students to educational institutions. Compared to previous studies, the program at MA Nurul Hikam highlights the flexibility and effectiveness of manual and participatory approaches in addressing limited resources, and underscores the importance of integrating formal, non-formal, and creative learning activities to comprehensively support students' foreign language acquisition.

Figure 1. Learning media in the form of posters displayed on the bulletin board.

Figure 2. Students' work on the graffiti-themed lesson.

Figure 3. English Club Extracurricular Activity.

Figure 4. Participating in various school activities.

CONCLUSIONS

This activity provided valuable experience and demonstrated a positive impact on the English learning process within the school environment. By adopting an innovative and interactive approach, the university students successfully created a more enjoyable and participatory learning atmosphere. What was once a one-way teaching process evolved into a more dynamic experience through techniques such as group discussions, educational games, and ice-breaking activities that encouraged active student engagement. Furthermore, the use of visual media in the form of posters displayed on the school's bulletin board proved to be an effective learning tool. These posters not only enriched the visual learning environment but also sparked students' curiosity before classroom sessions began. This strategy demonstrated that learning does not always have to take place inside the classroom, it can also be facilitated through simple yet engaging media.

The extracurricular English Club also made a meaningful contribution by creating a low-pressure alternative learning space. Although it was only held twice due to the school's tight schedule and the Ramadan holiday, the activity successfully drew student interest to speak English more casually and confidently. Students' enthusiasm was evident during discussions, as well as in their eagerness to ask questions or share stories in English. This highlights the essential role of informal

learning spaces like English Club in complementing formal education, which is often limited by time and curriculum constraints.

Beyond teaching activities, we also participated in various school programs, such as speech contests, social aid distribution, student health initiatives, and environmental programs. Involvement in these activities strengthened the relationship between us as university students and the school community, while also providing a broader understanding of school life dynamics, social values, and the work culture within educational settings. This experience not only enriched our academic insight but also helped develop empathy, a sense of responsibility, and adaptability within the community.

As a follow-up to this program, it is hoped that the school will consider continuing the English Club as a regular extracurricular activity. Likewise, visual learning media such as posters should be continually developed and updated in accordance with the lesson materials, so students remain stimulated by interesting learning prompts. For other students or parties planning to carry out similar initiatives, it is essential to conduct preliminary observations and dialogue with the school to ensure that the designed program truly addresses real needs on the ground. Creativity, flexibility, and a willingness to engage with the school community are key to the successful implementation of community service projects in the field of education. Moreover, higher education institutions should actively promote and facilitate similar programs on an ongoing basis, not just as mandatory assignments such as internships or community service programs (KKN), but also as independent initiatives rooted in students' social awareness.

In conclusion, this activity not only contributed to the improvement of English learning quality at the partner school but also played a major role in shaping the character and social competence of university students as future educators and agents of change in society.

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